



CM/PO335 BRITISH POLITICS
IES Abroad London

DESCRIPTION:

This module will use the question of how pluralist British Politics is, to take students on a journey through under-examined aspects of British histories, cultures, and politics. In many respects it tackles the themes of traditional British Politics courses, but will provide a fresh new set of perspectives which begins from some of the inequalities which ripple through contemporary Britain. The aim is that by exploring different positionalities and perspectives, some of the long-standing fracture lines in British society and politics can become better understood. Further, the module presents a version of politics in which power is dispersed throughout civil society, rather than held centrally in Westminster. We will explore the idea that the body politic is something that we all have the capacity to shape, and that we are all a part of, rather than something that is remote and inaccessible.

This is an introductory course on contemporary British politics, and therefore requires no previous political science requirement.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COST: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

This course will be delivered via a 2.5-hour seminar per week. Students will be expected to have done the prescribed reading for the sessions so that they can fully participate in course exercises. During seminars, students will engage in thoughtful discussions about the week's topic and assigned reading(s), as well as work on both solo and group activities and tasks.

The seminars will provide opportunity for students to share their experiences and their perception of British politics, giving them the chance to develop their theoretical understanding and communication skills. Students will be able to obtain further help in their studies by approaching the course leaders, either after seminars or at other mutually convenient times.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Course participation - 10%
- Oral presentation – 30%
- Mid-term Exam - 30%
- Final Exam - 30%

Course Element

Course Participation

In addition to physical presence in class, your class participation score is based on the mastery of assigned course readings as reflected in a consistent, valid contribution to class discussions, in-class exercises, and in asking questions that enrich the on-going discourse. Please refer to the IES Abroad London Participation and Conduct Rubric for further details.

Oral Presentation

In groups of two students give a 10–15-minute presentation. The topic will be agreed with your tutor.

Students should be prepared to take questions from the course tutor. A full list of resources used is required and the use of presentational tools like PowerPoint is encouraged.



A presentation will be accompanied by a 1500 word written summary each group will have to submit.

Midterm Exam

Students sit a closed-book mid-term examination in which they answer a range of questions related to the material covered in the first half of this term. In response to questions and prompts students provide short answers or examples to demonstrate their factual and conceptual understanding of the themes we addressed in class. The course tutor will run a revision workshop to help prepare for the exam.

Final Exam

Students sit a final closed-book examination in which they answer two essay questions.

The selection of questions students can choose from may relate to any subject they were introduced to during this course. The tutor will run a revision workshop to help prepare for the exam.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify the relevant actors that have shaped political processes at different stages, as well as the interplay between their interests, opportunities and constraints they face;
- Evaluate the role of different institutional settings in shaping the choices that politicians make;
- Compare the effectiveness and stability of different political systems and alternative forms of organizing a democracy;
- Analyze the historical evolution of political ideals and their correspondence with particular types of institutions;
- Assess the impact of political processes on political institutions, and how in turn institutions shape political processes;
- Attain critical analysis skills on issues of institutional design.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Regular class attendance is mandatory. Irregular attendance may result in a lower grade in the course, and/or disciplinary action. The IES Abroad London class attendance policy does not allow for unexcused absences, and grades will be docked one-half letter grade for each such absence. Rare exceptions will be made for the following reasons:

- The student is too sick to attend class. In this instance, the student must call the IES Abroad Centre before class to notify any of the IES Abroad staff. It is not sufficient either to email, send a message with a friend or call the Centre after the class has started.
- A serious illness or death in the immediate family requiring a student to travel home. This requires written approval from the Centre Director before departure.

Arriving more than 10 minutes late to class may count as an unexcused absence. Immigration laws in the UK are extremely strict, and we jeopardize our legal status in hosting students who do not regularly attend class. Students who do not attend class regularly will be reported to the appropriate officials and risk dismissal from the program and deportation from the UK. If a student incurs absences representing 25% of the total class hours, they will be contacted by the Academic Programme Manager (APM) and Centre Director (CD). If these absences are made up exclusively of unexcused non-attendance, this will trigger a disciplinary review. If these absences are made up of excused non-attendance, a meeting will be held to discuss the underlying reasons for lack of attendance, and to discuss ways it can be maintained for the duration of the term. If the 25% threshold is reached due to a mixture of excused and unexcused absences, students will also be asked to attend a meeting to discuss.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 1	Current issues in British politics We will be taking a broad look at the issues that have been dominating the political headlines and shaped the discourse in Westminster: The cost of living crisis, housing shortage, culture wars, the refugee (small boat) crisis as well as migration numbers in general, accusations of sleaze in government, Labour's efforts to rebrand itself, the decline of the Conservatives in the wake of the Johnson and Truss governments and the plans of the Labour government. These topics are interwoven with the wider themes of this course as we will see in the coming weeks when we will be considering how parliament, political parties, government and the media address the issues facing the country.	Required reading: The relevant chapters in your textbook for this class are 1, 2 and 3 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Exercise: Familiarise yourself with the following podcasts. Report back to class: Which podcast have you found most useful and why? The News Agents – https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-news-agents/id1640878689 Political Currency – https://www.globalplayer.com/podcasts/42KvVZ/ Politics Weekly - https://www.theguardian.com/politics/series/politicsweekly Political Thinking - https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04z203l The Rest is Politics - https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-rest-is-politics/id1611374685 Westminster Hour - https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006s624
Week 2	The British constitution The British constitution is an unusual creature as it has never been enshrined in one document. Instead, it consists of a collection of statutes, conventions and precedents that rule current political and institutional practice. Over time constitutional arrangements, the role of the monarchy and the practice of political decision making are evolving. Often, this process comes about gradually. However, at times, parliamentary decisions or referenda lead to drastic alterations of the constitutional fabric. The decision to leave the EU is the most prominent example in recent years. Our review of constitutional arrangements will cast light on the role of the Monarchy and reflect on the function of the Supreme Court in the political process.	Required reading: The relevant chapters in your textbook for this class are 6 and 9 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further Reading: Institute for government: The British constitution since 1997 file:///C:/Users/kreuz/Downloads/Rycroft-%20IFG%20-%202022%20-%20The%20British%20Constitution%20since%201997.pdf Exercise: Consider the advantages and the disadvantages of enshrining constitutional arrangements in a single written document. How would such a move benefit or hamper political decision making

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 3	Parliament – the Lords and the Commons The history of parliament in England goes back to the middle ages. Simon de Montford in the 13th century is widely credited with initiating the idea by summoning burghers from towns and cities across England to attend an assembly that would deliberate and decide policies. We will be tracing the evolution of parliamentary structures and the emergence of two separate chambers – the Commons and the Lords, the latter until recently entirely made up of hereditary peers. We will be casting a light on the democratization of the electoral practice since 1832, culminating after World War I, when women were granted the right to vote. We will be discussing how in 1911 the Lords lost their veto and consider reasons for the Parliament Act of 1949 stipulating that the upper chamber can delay bills by no more than one year. This session will critically assess major reform on the eve of the 21st century that aimed to abolish hereditary peers, replacing them with life peers, appointed for their life achievement. As this latest reform is unfinished in class we will be considering how a further reform of the House of Lords might affect the Commons, the legislative process and the state of democracy in the UK.	Required reading: The relevant chapter in your textbook for this class is 8 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: Institute for government - What is wrong with the House of Commons? https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/event/online-event/whats-wrong-house-commons-book-launch-dr-hannah-white Exercise: Watch the video you can access through the link above and report back on the weaknesses the authors have identified in the decision-making procedures of the House of Common.
Week 4	Political parties and ideologies We will be reflecting on two major parties that have shaped the path of British politics since the beginning of the 20th century: The Conservatives and Labour. The LibDems have consistently come third, but were needed in 2010 to form coalition government with the Conservatives. The Green Party, while vocal in the media and often ingenious in its use of social media, currently only hold four seats – a record number in their history. We will also be turning to Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish politics that are moulded by their respective national parties and in particular the Scottish Nationalists' group which in the Westminster Parliament for many years were vocal champions of Scottish interests. We will be tracing how ideological direction of each party evolved over time - often quite dramatically. The Labour Party in the early 1980s during the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union advocated nationalisation of industries, pacifism and unilateral nuclear disarmament. A decade later Labour's leader Tony Blair promoted an aspirational society that welcomed entrepreneurship. The Conservatives have been on a trajectory of their own from being a neoliberal and culturally tolerant party in the 2010s to an outfit engaged in culture wars and obsessed with border protection in the early 2020s.	Required reading: The relevant chapters in your textbook for this class are 14, 15 and 16 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: Britain's political parties and the constitution – Britains political parties and the constitution - Tim Bale 2022 (1).pdf Exercise: Investigate the party manifestos for the 2024 general election and identify the political themes that are addressed by all major parties.

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 5	Elections and Campaigns This session will start with a discussion of 1979, the watershed moment for election campaigns in the UK when the Conservatives roped in professional advertisers to spruce up their campaigning. For more than a decade the agency Saatchi and Saatchi became synonymous with Tory electoral successes. We will see how the Labour party caught up only in the 1990s when Tony Blair followed Bill Clinton's example and set up a "war room" style campaign headquarter staffed with communication professionals, who would adopt strategies and tactics pioneered in commercial advertising. In class we trace the itinerary of election campaigning in the UK to the present day which reflects on the big political themes and the ideological choices made by party leaders.	Required reading: The relevant chapters in your textbook for this class are 17, 18 and 19 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: UK election analysis 2019 file:///C:/Users/kreuz/Downloads/Bournemouth%20Uni%20-%20Analysis%202019%20general%20elections.pdf Exercise: Look at an electoral map and describe the geographical distribution of support both for Labour and the Conservatives in the 2019 and 2024 general elections. Try and make
Week 6	The Prime Minister and the Cabinet In the course of this session we will learn that the office of Prime Minister is not enshrined in a formal constitution and for much of British political history the term was at best used dismissively. In the 19th century "Prime Minister" was a mocking term for a man (women were excluded from the job in those days) who was too big for his boots. And to the present day the door sign at 10 Downing Street does not read "Prime Minister", but Instead First Lord of the Treasury. In this session we will be discussing the towering figure of the PM and the extraordinary domestic policy making power that comes with the job: The Prime Minister has in more recent history repeatedly been described as an elected dictator. In normal times, when the incumbent commands a parliamentary majority there are few if any checks and balances that rein in the office's executive authority: No written constitution, a supreme court with little power to oppose political decision making, regional legislatures of limited relevance and a parliamentary party in Westminster that in large part is on the government payroll, which ensures their loyalty to the PM.	Required reading: The relevant chapter in your textbook for this class 7 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: Institute for government: Becoming Prime Minister file:///C:/Users/kreuz/Downloads/becoming-prime-minister-%20Institute%20for%20government%202019.pdf Exercise: Reflect on the personality, experience and expertise you like to see in a Prime Minister. Discuss your answers and relate the emerging profile to the tasks and challenges a British head of government needs to address.

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 7	Policy making and the civil service This session addresses the interface between political ideas and their implementation. It is a task that requires the interplay of politicians and managers who operate the levers in government departments and agencies. We will be exploring the role of ministers and their latitude (or lack thereof) to chart and steer government policy. This calls for a discussion of the resources and the expertise at their disposal that is provided by a civil service which in the UK is non-partisan, i.e. senior civil servants serve the country, not the party or an individual politician, and as a result they tend to survive changes of governments. However, what at first sight appears to be an exemplary arrangement to retain expert knowledge regardless of changing majorities in parliament, is not without its flaws.	Required reading: The relevant chapters in your textbook for this class are 10 and 20 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: Institute for government - Civil Service recruitment https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/eve-nt/civil-service-recruit-top-talent Exercise: The British civil service is made up of staff that is not affiliated with either political party. That means, senior civil servants advise ministers and Prime Ministers whose party and policies they may not have supported in the elections. In your opinion, what is the advantage and what might be the downside of a politically non-affiliated civil service?
Week 8	How the media shaped politics in the UK We will be reading excerpts from John Lloyd's book "What the media has done to our politics", where Lloyd argues that the UK media's aggressive, superficial and overtly polarizing political coverage alters the nature of politics and political processes. He argues that political protagonists are incentivized to avoid genuine dialogue with critical audiences. Instead, they stage-manage their public appearances, design policies and package messages for media consumption or revert to tactics and strategies commonly associated with celebrities. He goes on to argue that personalization supersedes comprehensive engagement with policy alternatives. While it is contentious whether the media has triggered and accelerated this development, the phenomenon is irrefutable. Against this backdrop we observe a professionalization of government communication which in a similar vein is intended to fend off barrages of hostile media stories. In this class session we will consider the consequences of government information management in the UK and particularly question its repercussions for the relationship and the level of trust between government and citizens.	Required reading: The relevant chapter in your textbook for this class is 5 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: McTaggart lecture 2022 In full: Emily Maitlis delivers the MacTaggart Lecture at the Edinburgh International TV Festival - Bing video Exercise: Watch Emily Maitlis' speech at the 2022 McTaggart lecture and assess if and to which degree her description of the relationship between public service broadcasting and populist leaders is fair?

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 9	Devolution This class aims to familiarize students with devolution and its lasting impact on the UK's constitutional structure, political decision making and national identities. The term describes the process of transferring power from the centre (Westminster) to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. We will be analysing the asymmetric nature of devolution in the UK by reviewing how different parts of the UK have different forms of devolution and varying degrees of power. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland now all possess executive and legislative devolution, while Metro Mayors in parts of England (and the Mayor of London) have only executive powers. In class we will be looking at the history of devolution – described by the former Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies, as “process, not an event”-, ask whether it has changed policy making for the better and discuss how it may evolve in years to come.	Required reading: The relevant chapters in your textbook for this class are 11 and 12 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6 th edition) Further reading: House of Commons Library – introduction to Devolution in the UK https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8599/CBP-8599.pdf Exercise: Think about the advantages of centralized political decision making in a unitary state. Consider how the process and the quality of policy making could be affected by devolving legislative and executive power to the regions. Discuss why governments may be wary about advancing the devolutionary process.
Week 10	Windrush legacy: Immigration since the 1950s In this session we will be turning to the discourse about immigration that has been featuring prominently in British politics since the 1950s. After World War II. A dramatic labour shortage convinced governments that inviting people from the colonies was the right policy to adopt. Arrivals in those years were commonly referred to as the Windrush generation, taking its name from a ship that arrived at Tilbury in the Thames estuary with a few hundred families from the Caribbeans who would make England their new home. At the time migrating to the UK was not limited by legal hurdles for people who resided in the Empire. We will trace developments in the 1970s and 1980s when rules were tightened as mass migration became a highly controversial issue in the British political discourse. The subject gained in prominence once more when the UK's thriving labour market in the first years of the 21st century absorbed large numbers of migrants from central European member states of the EU. The ensuing debate directly contributed to the campaign for the Brexit referendum: We will be reviewing the argument that the vote in favour of leaving the EU was a consequence of a policy of free movement of people the UK was required to adopt by the EU treaty. This session traces the history of migration from the British perspective and while it assesses the advantages of open borders it also casts light on the ongoing resentment migrants encounter in parts of the community.	Required reading: The relevant chapter in your textbook for this class is 4 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6 th edition) Further reading: Migration Observatory: Migrants in the UK Labour market https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/ Exercise: Find news articles about David Lammy, Rishi Sunak and Diane Abbott and research their respective backgrounds. What do their stories tell us about the experiences and the role of ethnic minority protagonists in British politics?

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 11	Beyond Brexit: The future of UK-EU relations The UK was a latecomer in the European Communities - as the association of European states was called in the 1970s when the government in London decided to join. At the time the Conservatives were ardent advocates of membership as they believed a common market for goods and services would encourage British businesses to innovate and become more competitive. In this session we will learn how the European Communities evolved into what is now known as the European Union, leading to growing resentment among the Tories about the political dimension of the rules and regulations drawn up by EU institutions in Brussels. There was a growing suspicion that what had started out as an extensive trading area was being turned into a political union with its shared currency, joint foreign policy and plans for a common army. That trajectory, it was feared among Conservative and Socialist circles alike, would undermine national sovereignty. We will be highlighting how pressure mounted for a referendum on EU membership. Students will recognize how the media and political demands persuaded Prime Minister David Cameron to grant a referendum which took place on 23 June in 2016. In brief, we will be considering the causes of Brexit and assess the consequences both politically and economically.	Required reading: The relevant chapter in your textbook for this class is 13 (<i>Exploring British Politics</i> by Garnett et al., 6th edition) Further reading: Cambridge Econometrics: London's economy after Brexit. Impact and implications https://www.camecon.com/what/our-work/londons-economy-after-brexits-impact-and-implications/ Exercise: Talk to a British voter about their views on Brexit. Ask him/her about their preference in 2016 and find out if and why their position may have shifted in subsequent years. Relate these answers to what you have learned from your textbook chapter about popular sentiments about the European Union.
Week 12	Global Britain? Foreign and defence policy Students will familiarize themselves with British foreign policy, which traditionally sought to balance the power blocks on the continent: In the 18th, 19th and right into the 20th century the concern of UK governments was the potential rise of a dominant force in Europe that could become a threat to the United Kingdom. The second main theme has been the notion of a "global Britain", i.e. a country that claims to play a political role far beyond its geographical region. This claim was for centuries informed by the international perspective of the British Empire. When the colonies in the course of the 20th century gained independence, Britain would endeavor to maintain and protect its far-flung economic and diplomatic interests. Yet a shift of military and economic clout from the West to the East, the rise of China and India, has led to a relative decline of Britain's capacity to operate on a world-wide scale. We will discuss how the British voice on the international stage has been amplified by its membership in international organisations, e.g. a permanent seat on the UN's security council and between 1973 and 2020 EEC (today EU) membership. We will be examining how current and future foreign secretaries will have to come to terms with a diverse range of challenges ranging from climate warming, concerns about extremism and conflict in the Middle East, an increasingly confident superpower in the shape of China and blatant Russian aggression. We will also be looking at old themes that will remain core to British interests, mainly its "special relationship" with her closest ally, the United States.	Required reading: A text for this week will be assigned by your tutor Further reading: UK in a changing Europe: British foreign policy https://ukandeu.ac.uk/post-global-britain-a-new-normal-in-uk-foreign-policy/ Exercise: Under the Charta of the UN countries are expected to withdraw from colonial possessions. Currently, the UK has 14 overseas territories which it intends to keep. Why do you think the British governments choose not to comply?

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Guided themed walking tour of Whitehall and Westminster
- Guided visit of the Houses of Parliament

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Garnett, M., Dorey, P. and Diamond, P. (2024) *Exploring British Politics*. 6th edition. London, Routledge

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Conservative Home - <https://conservativehome.com/columnists/>
- GuidoFawkes - <https://order-order.com/>
- Institute for Public Policy Research - <https://www.ippr.org/>
- LabourList - <https://labourlist.org/>
- Political Currency - <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/political-currency/id1706536336>
- PoliticoEurope - <https://www.politico.eu/>
- Politics Exchange - <https://policyexchange.org.uk/>
- Politics Home - <https://www.politicshome.com/about-politicshome>
- Political Thinking - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04z203l>
- Politics Weekly - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/series/politicsweekly>
- The News Agents – <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-news-agents/id1640878689>
- The Rest is Politics - <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-rest-is-politics/id1611374685>
- Westminster Hour - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006s624>
- List of recommended readings. If there are different categories (films, etc.) use a bold header (e.g. Filmography) followed by another unordered list.