Instructor Information

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Course Overview

This course will introduce you to the main political institutions and actors in Britain today. It will explore the historical and social contexts of British politics and detailed consideration will be given to competing ideologies and values that have shaped political developments in this country by drawing on pertinent social science approaches and concepts. The overarching framework will be consideration of Britain as a changing liberal democracy and an examination will be made of what Britain shares and what differentiates it from other liberal democracies such as the U.S.A. and other European Union states.

Britain is arguably the world’s oldest parliamentary democracy. It has an apparently confusing set of political institutions that combine historical continuity and change to modernity. Britain is heralded as a modern, free and democratic country, yet the head of state is a hereditary monarch, and there is an established church under the protection of the monarch. There is a bicameral legislature, yet one chamber is not elected. There are liberties under common law and it is only recently that human rights were codified and become an integral part of British law. There is a constitution but it is not written in a single document. Elections are free and corruption is virtually non-existent, and the electorate take a lively interest in political matters, as befits a free popular democracy. This is especially true at the present moment for reasons we will be examining. Nevertheless, there is no separation of powers, rather the reverse, in fact, and the electoral system has created a distorted political system, which will be examined in the light of the recent General Election. As you may discover while you are here, there is also a culture of pervasive secrecy in public life, despite the fact that the Government is in favour of the citizen’s right to know. In addition, on October 1st 2009 the new Supreme Court came into existence and this may prove to be a major constitutional change.

Britain, let alone the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a multi-national state and the consequences of this plurality have been manifold, ranging from decades of violent conflict in Northern Ireland or the rise of much more benign forms nationalism in Scotland and Wales to the British variant of liberal ‘multi-culturalism’ that has developed with the arrival of successive groups of immigrants from ‘Commonwealth’ countries and elsewhere. Nevertheless, from a broad comparative perspective, British polity may be considered consensual without
religious, racial, ethnic and nationality differences translating into major political cleavages. Social class remains more significant in shaping mainstream political divisions and parties’ are still distinguished with reference to equality or liberty, state or market, tradition or progress. That said the convergence of several major developments have blurred or overlaid the differences traceable to these values. These include the end of the ‘Cold War’ and the apparent triumph of neo-liberal capitalism and consumerism, the dissolution or marginalization of traditional working class and trade unions, acceleration of ‘globalization’ and transnational issues such as environmental degradation, political religion, North-South divide, immigration, terrorism or indeed the current economic crisis. The combined impact of such changes has caused the major political parties to squeeze together in the ‘centre-ground’ whilst striving to rebrand and differentiate themselves with grand concepts such as Tony Blair’s ‘Third Way’ or now David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ and Ed Miliband’s ‘Good Society’.

Since 1973 Britain has been a member of the European Union and this has had a profound effect on British politics. It is an issue that cuts right across traditional divisions, and, at times, has come close to destroying the basic two-party political system in the U.K. More recently, Scotland and Wales gained the right to govern themselves with regard to devolved matters. To these must be added the questions posed by the Iraq war and the decline in America’s relative international power for Britain’s ‘special relation’ with the US. These and other factors have contributed to causing the ‘British’, too, to question exactly who they are and what is their place in the modern world.

In June 2007, after ten years as Prime Minister, Tony Blair was replaced by Gordon Brown, who promised to govern in a different manner to that of his predecessor. He, in fact, had a torrid time over the last three years without fulfilling his promise. Consequently for the first time since 1992, the result of the May 6 General Election was uncertain up to polling day with the Conservatives eventually topping the poll but without a majority of seats in the House of Commons. The outcome has been the present Conservative-Liberal Democrat government, the first coalition government in the UK since the Second World War. Already during its short life, the new government has embarked on what many see as an exceptionally radical agenda in almost every area of public life from the cherished National Health Service to the electoral system. Others, however, see the present government taking advantage of the financial crisis to pursue an agenda largely set in terrain with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in 1980 and continued through the Blair and Brown years from 1997 - 2010.

Against this background, the course aims to give you a critical and thorough, if basic, understanding of political Britain and thereby also prepare you for your internship. Thoroughness requires clear knowledge of the defining features of British political institutions and the system that links and regulate them. Critical understanding is mediated by a clear application of the values with reference to which we may judge institutions, policies or indeed political systems. Such values include, liberty, equity, equality, efficiency, prosperity, effectiveness, democracy and tradition. Politicians often claim all or most of them for their parties and policies, but in practice prioritize and pursue them in accordance with their ideological agendas, constituencies, and electoral calculations.

The same goes when we turn to evaluate Britain’s unitary political system where ministers are at same time members of one of the houses of parliament, or first past the post system that governs elections to the House of Commons. The advocates of these systems often defend them by claiming that they produce more effective and efficient governance compared to alternatives based on clear separation of the executive and legislature or some form of proportional representation. Their opponents usually emphasise the democratic deficit of the ‘Westminster model’ whilst also questioning its effectiveness, and so the debate goes on. Once you have examined such debates in the light of the structural logic and actual performance of the institutions in question, you have to draw your own conclusions with reference to your own value hierarchy. This process would be facilitated and enriched by the comparative perspective which can throw further light on certain otherwise hidden weaknesses and strengths of every
system. And you are of course fortunate for knowing at the least the American system as a citizen as well as a student of politics.

**Learning and Teaching**

Each session will be divided into lectures, group discussions, and group and individual presentations. Thus the learning and teaching will be interactive and you are expected to participate fully.

**Assessment**

- A final examination in which you are required to answer two questions in two hours (40% of the final grade).
- An essay of approximately 2500 words to be submitted at the start of the final exam on an approved topic (40% of the final grade).
- An oral presentation in one of the sessions addressing for up to twenty minutes one of the issues covered in that session (10% of the final grade). A one page outline should be submitted on the day of the presentation.
- Regular attendance and participation (10% of the final grade).
- At week three there will be a formative test intended as an exercise to have a better understanding of the skills and issues that may require greater attention for achieving the courses’ objectives.

**Assessment Criteria**

In assessing your work, particular attention is paid to the following qualities:

Relevance- Make sure that you have understood the question and its key terms precisely and outline and develop your answer accordingly. Don’t simply write everything you remember or can glean about the general issue in question.

Substance- You should demonstrate familiarity with the main facts and arguments regarding the topic in question. Explicit evidence of having studied and understood the required readings is essential. You are also encouraged to use up-to-date illustrative material from the press or other media as appropriate. The conclusions you draw should be you own and refer explicitly to the evidence, argument and values on which they are based.

Clarity- Your coursework should be in an accessible and clear language.

Coherence- The arguments presented should be well structured and the relationship between them made clear. The conclusions should be informed by preceding discussion and evidence and not merely asserted.

Referencing- The sources for the arguments and factual information used are given.

**Attendance**

Attendance and participation are inseparable and together form part of the assessment as outlined above. A register will be taken at the end of each session and attendance will also be used to moderate final grades. Absenteeism from class without adequate written justification will result in a diminution of final grade on a pro-rata basis. Conversely, excellent attendance will result in an upgrade of the classification where the final examination standard is borderline.
Grading

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria, attendance requirements and policies on plagiarism:

Schedule and Basic Reading

Please note that precise sections, where relevant, are given below, but you are strongly encouraged to research each topic from the additional reading suggested, and the wider range of books available. Other readings will be suggested in class.

Thursday 13 January: British Politics in an Historical Context
Reading: Jones, chapters 2-3 & Appendix; Budge, Introduction & chapter 27; Dunleavy chapters 1, 9-12

Wednesday 19 January: The Major Political Parties and Competing Ideologies
Reading: Jones, chapters 4-5, 11; Budge chapters 16 & 17; Dunleavy pp119-135

Thursday 20 January: The ‘Westminster’ model of Governance and the British ‘Constitution’
Reading: Jones, chapter 13; Budge chapter 4, Dunleavy pp 1-38

Thursday 20 January: The Houses of Parliament and the Monarchy
Reading: Jones, 14-16; Budge chapter 18; Dunleavy pp 1-38

Wednesday 26 January: The Executive: the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Civil Service
Reading: Jones, 17-19 and pp. 379-81; 480-82; Budge, chapters 5-7; Dunleavy pp. 119-135.
Budge, chapters 16 & 17, Dunleavy pp119-135

Thursday 27 January: The Executive: Prime Minister and Cabinet
Reading: Budge chapter 15, Dunleavy pp 100-118

Wednesday 2 February: Britain as a Multi-national State: Devolution and Local Government
Reading: Jones, chapters 12, 19; Budge, chapters 11-12

Thursday 3 February: Britain Beyond its Shores: Europe, America, Commonwealth and the World
Reading: Jones, chapter 25, 27, pp. 54-55; Budge, 8-9

Contingency Class Date: Friday 4 February. Students are obligated to keep this date free to attend class should any class dates need to be rescheduled.

Wednesday 9 February: Houses of Parliament and Westminster Walk (TBC)
Details to follow by email

Thursday 10 February: English Traditions, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship: Monarchy, Church of England, Secular Liberalism, Fringe movements, and Immigrant Communities
Reading: Jones, chapter 6, 14; Budge, 26
Monday 14 February: **Final Examination.** Exam times and locations will be posted on the BU London website and in the Student Newsletter two weeks before exam dates.

* Please note that further readings may be suggested in class as appropriate.

** The first Internship Tutorial meeting will be held on the day of the ninth (last) Core lecture, 10 February, 1.30-3pm (Boston room).

In addition, you must attend a Mandatory Internship Briefing at the Cine Lumiere, 17 Queensberry Place, London, SW7 2DT. You will be emailed with the time closer to the date.

**Required Reading**

Please purchase and read as suggested above: Bill Jones and Philip Norton, eds. *Politics UK* (Pearson: 2010)

Further required readings may be posted on the course webpage: [http://www.bu-london.co.uk/academic/po360](http://www.bu-london.co.uk/academic/po360) (you must be logged in to view materials).

**Selected Additional Reading (all in the BU library)**

I. Budge, I. Crewe, D. Mckay, K. Newton The New British Politics (latest edition)
P Dunleavy et al. eds Developments in British Politics, Number 8
H. Barnet Britain Unwrapped
Bill Jones Politics UK (5th Edition)
S. Ludlam New Labour in Government
D. Leonard Elections in Britain
D. Kavanagh The Powers Behind the Prime Minister
D. Kavanagh et al British Politics
R. Eccleshall Biographical Dictionary of British prime Ministers
T. Enright The British Political Process: An Introduction
V. Bogdanor Devolution in the United Kingdom.
J. Barry-Jones The Road to a National Assembly for Wales.
J. Morrison Reforming Britain
P. Joyce Law, Order and the Judiciary
L. Pye British Politics: Ideas and Concepts
A. Heywood Politics
A. Vincent Modern Political Ideologies
P. Norton The Constitution in Flux
P. Hennessy The Hidden Wiring
The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders Since 1945
The Secret State
M. Moran British Politics and Society
M. Moran Politics and Governance in the UK
C. Pilkington Issues in British Politics
D. Butler et al The British General Election of 1997
D. Butler & The British General Election of 2005
D. Kavanagh Marketing the Labour Party
D. Rosenbaum From Soapbox to Soundbite
A. Brown Politics and Society in Scotland
B. Taylor  The Scottish Parliament
B. Coxall & L. Robins  Britain Since the War
J. Redwood  Stars and Strife
R. Rogers  How Parliament Works
M. O’Neil (ed)  Devolution and British Politics
J Tonge  Northern Ireland
A Geddes & J Tonge  Britain Decides
J McGary & D O’Leary  The Northern Ireland Conflict
S Weir  Unequal Citizens
J. Pinder  The European Union
A. Blair  Companion to the European Union
M. Keating  The Government of Scotland
Rowntree Trust  Power to the People

Mass Media, Academic Journals and Websites

You are advise to read a “serious” British newspaper such as The Guardian, Independent, Daily Telegraph or Times, Financial Times (regularly updated full text versions of the first three are available on line). The Sunday editions of these papers are also informative. The Economist (weekly) and Prospect (monthly) are two informative magazines available at the library. Newsnight on BBC 2, (10.30-11.15 pm with no commercial breaks) and Channel Four News (7-7.30 pm) are worth watching to keep up with current political developments as is BBC Radio 4’s Today programme (6-9 am) a daily news and current affairs programme that is part of the staple diet of Britain’s political class. Andrew Marr Show, Sundays 9-10 am, is a must see for those interested in British politics.

You may access electronically a wide range of Politics journals at http://www.bu.edu/library/index.shtml, including Political Studies and Politics, two of the British Political Studies Association’s journals.

A sample of the on line information provided by the UK government and other official agencies and think tanks is provided as follows:

- Government Information Service http://www.open.gov.uk
- http://www.number-10.gov.uk (Prime Minister’s office)
- *EU’s sever: europa.eu.int
- www.psr.keele.ac.uk/parties (link to political parties)
- www.ukpolitics.org.uk (general link to other political websites)
- www.statistics.gov.uk (economic and social statistical data)
- www.cabinet-office.gov.uk (central and local government)
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation http://www.jrf.org.uk (Major charity with a social mission)
- Institute of Economic Affairs: www.iea.org.uk (right of centre think tank)
- Fabian Society: www.fabian-society.org.uk (traditional Social Democratic)
- Institute for Public Policy Research: www.ippr.org.uk (‘New Labour’)
- New Economics Foundation: www.neweconomics.org (radical)
- ResPublica www.respublica.org (‘Red Tory’ and close to David Cameron)
- http://thebigsoociety.co.uk/
Terms and Conditions

Attendance at all classes is mandatory. **Students must check their email and the weekly Student Newsletter for field trip updates and reminders.** Students missing lectures without a doctor's letter or authorisation from the Director or from the Placements Team will automatically be docked a - or a + from their final grade. Persistent lateness will also be penalised in the final grade. A register of attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session, and marks will be awarded for attendance. Absence can be conveyed by advising a senior member of staff in the Academic Affairs Office with a request that the information be passed on to me. Leaving it to another class member to convey messages will not be acceptable. Appointments for interviews for internships should not conflict with attendance at classes.

Any student who is unable to attend a class, or take part in an assignment because of religious reasons, must give notice of the fact in advance. He/she will be required to make up for time lost. In this situation arrangements must be made with another student for class notes to be shared.

Course work must be delivered before the agreed deadline and failure to hand in on time will result in deducted marks.

I will make some time available in each session for you to raise questions about the issues covered in that session as well as questions pertaining to other aspects of the course. Should you wish for a personal appointment, I will be available during the mid-lecture break or after the class as appropriate.