Britain past and present: history, language and institutions
Unit 6
Unit 6

Political parties, elections and government
The modern **Conservative party** developed from the **Tories**, who supported the monarchy in the 17th century and today it is still referred to as the **Tory Party**. Throughout long periods of British history it has been the dominant governing party. The Conservatives tend to have a conservative and traditionalist view of social life. They oppose rapid and radical changes in society and support social stability.

They uphold private and free enterprise and favour reduced state control and intervention in most areas of policy. The Conservatives also were against the idea that Britain should have joined the European single currency.
The Labour party was founded in the early 20th century from the trade union movement and continued for many years (up to the mid 1980s) to be seen as the party which represented the workers. The name ‘Labour’ was traditionally associated with the promotion of great reforms to favour social progress by means of heavy taxation to finance social welfare assistance programs.

The commitment to state control over major enterprises and companies operating in sectors of common public interest is no longer part of Labour's manifesto. With regard to foreign affairs, Labour has been keen to put Britain “at the heart of Europe” and to maintain the military and special diplomatic relationships with the United States.
Historically, British politics has always been characterised by a **two-party system**, which favours the two largest parties which sit opposite each other in the House of Commons. The leader of the winning party forms the government or **Cabinet**, and the party which comes second at a general election forms the **Opposition**. However, other parties do exist. If the United Kingdom had a proportional representation electoral system rather than a **majority system**, these other smaller parties would have more representation in Parliament.
Other parties in the UK

The third biggest force in politics is the Liberal Democratic party. It tries to make a compromise between Conservative and Labour views. The Liberal Democrats do not like the majority system, because although they come second in many constituencies, they do not win many seats in Parliament.

Other minor parties are the nationalist parties of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, all of which try to represent and promote their local interests.
Discussion questions

1) What did you know about the main British political parties before reading these texts?
2) Did you know there were minor parties in the UK?
3) Do you know who the current Prime Minister is?
4) Does the current Prime Minister belong to the Labour or to the Conservative party?
5) Do you know the name of the first woman Prime Minister in the history of British politics?
6) Which party did she belong to?
1) What was the original name of the Conservative party, still used today?
2) Who were the Tories?
3) How can you define the political *credo* of the Conservative party?
4) What is the Conservative party’s economic policy?
5) What are the origins of the Labour party?
6) What are the Labour Party’s main policies?
7) In foreign policy, how does the Labour party view relations with Europe and America?
8) Are there any other parties in the United Kingdom?
9) What type of electoral system does the UK have?
10) Why don’t smaller parties like this kind of electoral system?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>company</td>
<td>'kʌmpəni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>kən'sɜːvətɪv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>credo</td>
<td>'kri:doʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>currency</td>
<td>'kærənsɪ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enterprise</td>
<td>'entəpreɪz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finance</td>
<td>'feɪnəns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreign affairs</td>
<td>'fɔrən e'feəz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>'leɪβə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manifesto</td>
<td>,mæni'festəʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nationalist</td>
<td>'næʃnəlist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policy</td>
<td>'pɔlɪsi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social</td>
<td>'səʊʃəl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>society</td>
<td>sə'saɪtɪ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taxation</td>
<td>tæk'seɪʃn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Unions</td>
<td>treɪd 'juːnəns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployment</td>
<td>,ʌnɪm'pləɪmənt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welfare</td>
<td>'welfaə</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
General elections are held at least once every five years in Britain. The Prime Minister and his advisers can decide when to ‘call an election’. Every citizen over the age of 18 can vote and choose their MP but voting is not compulsory. People not entitled to vote include members of the House of Lords, members of the Royal family, the Queen and the registered mentally ill. People vote for the candidate they want to be represented by in Parliament. Elections are by secret ballot and people can vote in three different ways: in person at a polling station; by post when ballot papers are sent to citizens’ home addresses; by proxy, when a citizen who is unable to go to the polling station delegates someone to vote for him/her.
Before the elections, every party chooses a **candidate** for each **electoral district**, or **constituency**. Candidates, who must be over 21, conduct their campaign by **canvassing**, which means explaining their **programmes or manifestos** to the public. In each constituency voters must choose only one of the candidates from the different political parties. The candidate who obtains the most votes within a constituency becomes the **MP** for that constituency, even if he or she does not get an overall majority. When an MP dies or resigns a **by-election** is organised to fill the vacant parliamentary seat.
This ‘majority electoral system’ is also known as a ‘first-past-the-post system’, a metaphor from the world of horse racing.

It is based on the ‘winner-takes-all’ principle i.e. one vote more than the second party is sufficient to win.

The simple majority method favours the two-party system. Since the British electoral system is not based on proportional representation, all the other votes expressed do not count.
The UK has many political parties, some of which are represented in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Below are the political parties whose representatives were successful in elections to the House of Commons at the 2017 General Election:

- Conservative Party
- Labor Party
- Liberal Democrats
- Co-operative Party
- Democratic Unionist Party (Northern Ireland)
- Green party
- Plaid Cymru (Welsh nationalistic Party)
- Scottish National Party (Scottish nationalistic Party)
- Sinn Féin (Irish nationalistic Party)
The **UK Independence Party**, commonly known as **UKIP** is a **Eurosceptic** and right-wing populist **political party in the United Kingdom**. It was founded in 1993 by members of the **Anti-Federalist League** with the primary objective of securing the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the **European Union**. The party describes itself as a "democratic, libertarian party".

The party is led by **Nigel Farage**, with deputy leader **Paul Nuttall**. UKIP has two **Members of Parliament**, three representatives in the **House of Lords** and twenty-three **Members of the European Parliament**, making it the largest UK party in the **European Parliament**. In October 2014, UKIP reported a membership of over 40,000.

The party made its first significant breakthroughs in the **2013 local elections**, when it came fourth in the number of council seats won and third in nationwide vote share, and in the **2014 European elections** when UKIP received the most votes, the first time for over a century that a party other than Labour or the Conservatives won a **United Kingdom**-wide election.

**Ideology:** Euroscepticism, Right-wing populism, British unionism, Conservatism, Economic liberalism
After 43 years of being a part of the European Union, the UK decided to officially leave. A referendum was held on June 23, 2016 in the UK, which allowed citizens to vote on whether the country would stay within the EU or separate from it and be fully independent. The result of the referendum, in which nearly 30 million people took part, was 52% in favor of leaving, and 48% in favor of staying. Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty allows a member nation to leave the EU. This process takes two years, and leading Brexit voices in the UK say that the country could complete the process by as early as December 2018. Even so, the referendum was advisory, not compulsory, so the UK still has some chance to not leave.
United Kingdom general election, 2015

members

All 650 seats to the House of Commons
326 seats are needed for a majority.

Opinion polls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Leader since</th>
<th>Leader’s seat</th>
<th>Last election</th>
<th>Current seats</th>
<th>Seats needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Cameron</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>6 December 2005</td>
<td>Witney</td>
<td>306 seats, 36.1%</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>▲24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Miliband</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>25 September 2010</td>
<td>Doncaster North</td>
<td>258 seats, 29%</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>▲70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Clegg</td>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>18 December 2007</td>
<td>Sheffield Hallam</td>
<td>57 seats, 23%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>▲270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Incumbent Prime Minister
David Cameron
Conservative
2017 United Kingdom general elections
8 June 2017

All 650 seats in the House of Commons
326 seats needed for a majority

Leader
Theresa May
Jeremy Corbyn
Nicola Sturgeon

Party
Conservative
Labour
SNP

Leader since
11 July 2016
12 September 2015
14 November 2014

Leader’s seat
Maidenhead
Islington North
Did not stand[^21]

Last election
330 seats, 36.9%
232 seats, 30.4%
56 seats, 4.7%

Seats won
317*
262
35

Seat change
13
30
21

Popular vote
13,636,684
12,878,460
977,569

Percentage
42.4%
40.0%
3.0%

Swing
5.5%
9.6%
1.7%

[^21]: Did not stand
### 2017 United Kingdom general elections  
8 June 2017

All 650 seats in the House of Commons  
326 (+1) seats needed for a majority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Tim Farron</th>
<th>Arlene Foster</th>
<th>Gerry Adams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>Sinn Féin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader since</td>
<td>16 July 2015</td>
<td>17 December 2015</td>
<td>13 November 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last election</td>
<td>8 seats, 7.9%</td>
<td>8 seats, 0.6%</td>
<td>4 seats, 0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7[^4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat change</td>
<td>▲4</td>
<td>▲2</td>
<td>▲3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular vote</td>
<td>2,371,910</td>
<td>292,316</td>
<td>238,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swing</td>
<td>▼0.5%</td>
<td>▲0.3%</td>
<td>▲0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion questions

1) What did you know about elections in Britain before reading the text?
2) Is the first-past-the-post electoral system used in your country?
3) What type of electoral system is used in your country?
4) What are the basic differences between the majority electoral system and the proportional representation system?
5) How many different ways are there for voters in the UK to cast their votes?
6) Can voters in your country vote by proxy or by post?
Reading Comprehension Questions

1) How often are general elections held in the UK?
2) Can the Prime Minister in office decide the date for elections?
3) Who can vote?
4) Who cannot vote?
5) What does ‘secret ballot’ mean?
6) What is a ‘constituency’?
7) How old must candidates be to run for elections?
8) Who wins the elections?
9) What is a ‘by-election’ and when are they held?
10) What kind of electoral system is the first-past-the-post system?
11) How does it work?
12) What principle is the first-past-the-post system based on?
13) Which party is not in favour of the present electoral system?
14) Why don’t smaller parties like the majority electoral system?
After a general election, the leader of the party which has won the majority of seats in the House of Commons is appointed **Prime Minister** by the Queen. As head of the government, or **premier**, he/she then selects a group of leading ministers to form his/her **Cabinet**.

Cabinet meetings take place once a week in a large room at the premier’s official residence in **10, Downing Street, London**. New prime ministers can make changes in the size of the cabinet, can create new **ministries** and change old ones. Each member of the Cabinet is the political head of a **government department** or **Ministry**.
Decisions regarding government policy are usually taken by the Prime Minister together with the members of the Cabinet. However, in recent years, British Prime Ministers have been influenced by the American presidential style and have taken decisions on their own, hoping that the Cabinet and the majority of their party in Parliament will support their actions. In short, the real head of the United Kingdom is not the sovereign (or a president), but the premier.
The Chancellor of the Exchequer or head of the Treasury is a senior minister responsible for the government's public finance policy and state budget and for collecting taxes which the government will spend on defence, education and other social services.

Often simply called *The Chancellor*, he plays a role similar to that of Secretary of the Treasury or Minister of Finance in other countries.

The position is considered one of the four Great Offices of State and in recent times has come to be the most powerful office in British politics after the Prime Minister.
The four Great Offices of State

1) Prime Minister
2) Chancellor of the Exchequer
3) Foreign Secretary
4) Home Secretary
Her Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition, or the Official Opposition

The **Opposition** is the second largest party in Parliament and forms its own **Shadow Cabinet**, which is a team of leading spokespeople of the party. Its **Shadow Ministers** challenge and criticize the Government’s policies in Parliament and propose alternative ones.
Reading comprehension questions

1) Does the Queen appoint the Prime Minister?
2) Who chooses the Ministers to form the Cabinet?
3) What do Ministers do? What is their duty?
4) Why is the Chancellor of the Exchequer an important figure?
5) Name the 3 ways in which British people can cast their votes.
6) Which party is in Opposition today?
7) What is the Shadow Cabinet?
Pronunciation: say the words aloud

\[\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{i'lekʃn}} \\
\text{\textit{'sitizn}} \\
\text{\textit{'kændidət}} \\
\text{\textit{kən'stɪtjuənsi}} \\
\text{\textit{'tsaːnsələ}} \\
\text{\textit{'mɪnɪstə(r)}} \\
\text{\textit{'fædəʊ 'kæbɪnət}} \\
\text{\textit{'sʊvən}} \\
\text{\textit{'premɪə}} \\
\text{\textit{hed əv stɛət}} \\
\text{\textit{hed əv 'ɡɑːvnment}} \\
\text{\textit{hed əv 'tɛrəri}} \\
\text{\textit{ækt əv 'paːləmənt}} \\
\text{\textit{di'paːtəmənt}} \\
\text{\textit{'kænəsən̩j}} \\
\text{\textit{'lɛrə 'paːtɪ}} \\
\text{\textit{'bælət 'peɪpə(r)}}
\end{align*}\]
What do they mean?

• ballot paper
• by-election
• by post
• by proxy
• canvassing
• cast one’s vote (v.)
• Chancellor of the Exchequer
• Conservative party
• constituency
• first-past-the-post system
• Government Department
• head of the Treasury
• Labour party
• Ministry
• Opposition
• proportional representation system
• seats
• secret ballot
• Shadow Cabinet
• spokespeople
• ‘the winner takes all’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chamber</th>
<th>influential, dominant</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>constituency</td>
<td>discuss, argue (v.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voter</td>
<td>assembly room, House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leading</td>
<td>successful, victorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winning</td>
<td>elector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policy</td>
<td>be present at, go to (v.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powerful</td>
<td>strategy, plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debate (v.)</td>
<td>district, area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attend (v.)</td>
<td>most important, authoritative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary: match the synonyms</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>Chamber</td>
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<td>be present at, go to (v.)</td>
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1) The British Parliament has two chambers.
2) Voters must be 18 years old.
3) The Queen cannot attend government meetings.
4) Ministers debate and make decisions on important issues.
5) The Prime Minister is the most powerful person in the British government.
1) The British Parliament has two *chambers*.

2) *Voters* must be 18 years old.

3) The Queen cannot *attend* government meetings.

4) Ministers *debate* and make decisions on important issues.

5) The Prime Minister is the most *powerful* person in the British government.
6) The Prime Minister is going to present his economic **policy**.

7) Conservatives **uphold** private and free enterprise.

8) Labour **is keen** on putting Britain ‘at the heart of Europe’.

9) The **selection** of Ministers is carried out by the Prime Minister.

10) The members of the Royal family are not **entitled** to vote.
Synonyms: replace the word in *italics*

6) The Prime Minister is going to present his economic *policy*.

7) Conservatives *uphold* private and free enterprise.

8) Labour *is keen* on putting Britain ‘at the heart of Europe’.

9) The *selection* of Ministers is carried out by the Prime Minister.

10) The members of the Royal family are not *entitled* to vote.
Temporal expressions

1. before  
   A bill is debated in Parliament before becoming a law.

2. in the meantime

3. in the past

4. no longer

5. often

6. still

7. until

8. currently
Linkers

*although*  
*while*  
*because*

1. Only 92 hereditary peers retain their seat in the House of Lords _______ the hereditary right to sit and vote in the House of Lords was abolished in 1999.
2. Hereditary peers’ titles are inherited _______ those of Life Peers are only conferred to them and are not inherited by their heirs.
3. _______ Tony Blair’s government promised to replace the House of Lords with an elected chamber, the upper House is still an appointed chamber.
4. The House of Commons has much more power than the House of Lords: the former makes laws, _______ the latter can only delay a bill.
1) The __________ ____________ used in the UK for parliamentary elections is the first-past-the-post system.

2) For the purposes of general elections, the UK is divided up into ________________.

3) From an administrative point of view, the United Kingdom is divided into ___________ each with its own local government.

4) Each party puts forward a _____________ for the electoral contest in each constituency.
5) The candidate with the largest number of votes is elected to be the ___________ ______
________________________ for that constituency.
6) The first-past-the-post voting system favours the two most powerful ________________
7) The Opposition forms its own ________________ ________________.
8) The Shadow Cabinet has to ________________ the government’s policies and choices.
1. Conservatives have been the dominant party for many years.

2. The Labour Party was founded in the 20th century.

3. The head of Treasury collects taxes which the government will spend on social services.

4. If the UK had a proportional system, other parties would have more seats in Parliament.

5. The Conservative party developed from the Tories.

6. Liberal Democrats try to make a compromise between Labour and Conservative policies.

A

B

a. future

b. second conditional

c. simple present

d. simple past (passive)

e. simple past

f. present perfect
1. The party that wins the most seats wins the elections and forms the Government.  
2. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet have executive power.  
3. The first-past-the-post electoral system favours smaller parties.  
4. In order to vote, you must be 21.  
5. The Opposition forms its own Shadow Cabinet.  
6. ‘MPs’ means Members of Politics.  
7. A Constituency is an electoral district where voters elect one MP.  
8. Before the elections, every party chooses a candidate for each constituency.  
9. The Liberal Democrats want a proportional system.  
10. Britain has got a President.
<p>| | | | | |</p>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Every five years there must be a general election in Britain.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Members of the Cabinet come from the Opposition.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Power is held by the President in the UK.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The Shadow Cabinet is appointed by the second largest party.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Cabinet meetings are held at 10, Downing Street.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. All British people are able to vote in parliamentary elections.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The Liberal Democrats do not win many seats in Parliament.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Whoever receives the largest number of votes in a constituency becomes the MP for that constituency.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Voters cannot send their ballot papers by post.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Registered mentally ill people are not allowed to vote.</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hung Parliament (2010 ...)

a parliament in which no political party has enough seats to secure an overall majority
Cameron, Brown and Clegg

Facing the prospect of a hung parliament...

© morland / The Times
a parliament in which no political party has enough seats to secure an overall majority
Coalition government following the 2010 General Election

The 2010 General Election produced a hung Parliament. The Labour Government remained until a majority government could be formed.

A coalition government was formed on the 12 May 2010 between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.
The coalition government 2010

David Cameron and Nick Clegg
The coalition government 2017

Second May ministry and Conservative–DUP agreement

Theresa May declares her intention to remain in office following the election result outside 10 Downing Street, 9 June 2017
Any questions?