

CHAPTER 2: BRITAIN

Learning Objectives

- 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.
- 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.
- 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.
- 2.4 Explain why no country can be completely democratic.
- 2.5 Compare recent political quarrels in Britain to those in the United States.

Chapter Outline

- I. Why Britain Matters
 - a. Slow evolution to full democracy
 - b. Model for parliamentary systems worldwide
 - i. Fusion of power between legislative and executive because Britain was less worried about the concentrated power
 - ii. No “deadlock of democracy”
- II. Impact of the Past
 - a. Geography
 - i. Separated by water from hostile neighbors
 - ii. Not prone to invasion
 - 1. Allowed for independent development of political institutions
 - 2. Resulted in rarely having a large army
 - b. Magna Carta
 - i. Post-Rome, feudalism diffused authority in layers
 - ii. Long struggle to limit king and block absolutism
 - iii. Foundation for the slow evolution of representative democracy and civil rights
 - iv. Important step in this struggle was Magna Carta's limit on the monarch's powers
 - v. Common Law
 - 1. Originates with Germanic tribal law
 - 2. Systematized by Normans
 - 3. “Judge-made law”
 - 4. Stands in contrast to code law
 - c. The Rise of Parliament
 - i. English kings in need of taxes to fight wars (particularly against France)
 - 1. Kings relied on knights and leading burghers for taxes
 - 2. First involved them in the politics of the state
 - ii. Parliament established as extension of King's Court
 - 1. Knights and burghers formed lower house (House of Commons)
 - 2. Nobles and top churchmen formed upper house (House of Lords)
 - 3. Over time, the power of the House of Lords was diminished and the House of Commons' power grew
 - 4. Parliament served as blocking mechanism on an overly powerful king, just as the Magna Carta had

- iii. Henry VIII
 - a. Parliament's powers expanded under Henry VIII, who needed them in the struggle against the Catholic Church for his divorce
 - 2. King Henry's break from the Catholic Church and creation of the Anglican Church changed British political culture
 - d. Parliament versus King
 - i. England avoided the growth of absolutism in the late fifteenth century
 - ii. Seventeenth century brought religious splits, civil war, a royal beheading, and a military dictatorship to Britain
 - 1. Parliament benefitted most, becoming equal to the king
 - 2. James I's attempt at absolute monarchy and imposition of taxes angered Parliament
 - 3. Result was the English Civil War, which the Parliamentarians won, and the beheading of Charles I
 - iii. Further growth of democracy
 - 1. Republicans were among the antiroyalists who sought political equality
 - 2. Soldiers in the Parliamentary New Model Army demanded the vote
 - iv. Cromwell's Commonwealth
 - 1. Brief period without a king
 - a. Was a republic from 1649 until 1660
 - b. Discord ensued
 - 2. After Cromwell's death, Charles II (son of the Charles I) was invited back
 - a. English monarchy was restored
 - b. Parliament's powers were much stronger
 - v. The "Glorious Revolution"
 - 1. Charles II and James II moved to return to Catholicism
 - 2. James II was dethroned by Parliament and his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch husband William were invited to be queen and king
 - 3. "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 was bloodless
 - a. 1689 Bill of Rights established relationship between Parliament and monarchy
 - b. No taxes or laws without Parliament's consent
 - c. Major step to democracy
 - e. Prime Ministers and Democracy
 - i. George III picks obedient Lord North for prime minister
 - ii. After the American Revolution, the cabinet and prime minister were no longer responsible to the king but to Parliament
 - 1. The "government" is formed by the leader of the largest party in Commons and their chosen cabinet
 - iii. The Democratization of Parliament
 - 1. Although the supreme power by the late eighteenth century, Parliament was not democratic or representative
 - 2. Parties began to form (although initially only parliamentary caucuses)
 - a. Whig
 - b. Tory
 - 3. During the nineteenth century, a two-party system emerged
 - a. Whigs evolved into the Liberal Party
 - b. Tories evolved into the Conservative Party
 - 4. Parliament had to expand electorate after American and French revolutions

- a. Also a result of industrial revolution and economic growth
 - b. Changing class structure
 - i. Middle class
 - ii. Working class
 - c. To maintain political stability, Whigs brought some ordinary citizens into politics
 - i. This broadened their voter base
 - ii. Parliament passed the Reform Act of 1832, which expanded the electorate to 7% of adults
 - iii. Other waves of expansion of the electorate: 1867 Second Reform Act doubled electorate; 1884 Third Reform Act achieved nearly complete male suffrage; 1918 enfranchisement of women
 - iv. Gradual expansion of electorate avoided massive upheaval in the political system
 - 5. Parties became vehicles for democracy
 - f. The Rise of the Welfare State
 - i. British parties had to pay attention to demands for welfare measures by beginning of twentieth century because of their constituencies
 - ii. Expansion of the electoral franchise led to the development of the welfare state
 - iii. Labour Party broke out of “Lib-Lab” coalition to push own agenda of welfare measures for the working-class constituents
 - iv. Major debate since has been the growth of the welfare state and state ownership
- III. The Key Institutions
- a. The Monarch
 - i. Head of state
 - ii. “Psychological cement”
 - iii. Maintains loyalty of the public despite political mishaps
 - iv. Accepted by British but debates over cutting funds for royals and making females equal heirs to the throne continue
 - b. The Cabinet
 - i. Composed of experienced party MPs rather than specialized experts
 - ii. Fusion of powers
 - 1. About 100 MPs also serve in executive branch
 - iii. Collective responsibility practiced
 - iv. Current Cameron cabinet, or government, is a coalition (first since WWII) of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats
 - c. The Prime Minister
 - i. Picks and controls cabinet
 - ii. Heads largest party in Commons
 - iii. Therefore able to get nearly any measure passed
 - 1. Strong party discipline
 - 2. Enforced by party whips
 - 3. Bills are cautious because of public and backbencher opinion
 - iv. Prime ministers tend to become more presidential
 - 1. No longer merely “first among equals” in cabinet
 - 2. PMs spend less time in Commons
 - d. Commons
 - i. Only institution directly elected
 - ii. Prime minister’s authority from Commons
 - 1. However, PMs acting more like Presidents

2. They lead and control Commons
- iii. Her Majesty's Government faces Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition
- iv. Physical setup of Parliament reflects the two-party system
- v. Commons is less important than it used to be
 1. Effect on democracy?
- e. Lords
 - i. Relative powers of Commons and Lords changed over centuries
 1. Lords weakened by Commons
 2. No written constitution to prevent it
 3. Parliament is technically bicameral, but Commons has the real power and is usually solely identified as "Parliament"
 - ii. 1911 Parliament Act severely restricted the Lords' powers
 1. They can simply delay legislation for up to 30 days on financial bills
 2. Can delay other bills one year
 - iii. What role does Lords serve?
 1. "Conscience of the nation"
 2. Can debate controversial issues that Commons cannot
 - iv. What to do with Lords?
 1. Making it more democratic dilutes the legislative supremacy of Commons
 2. Occasional calls for reform are usually short-lived
 3. Now composed largely of "life peers," not hereditary ones
- f. Supreme Court
 - i. In 2009, a new Supreme Court of the United Kingdom was formed from the Law Lords
 - ii. Twelve "justices," but most cases are heard in panels with fewer justices
 - iii. Vacancies are filled by the "president" in a process that is designed to minimize political considerations
 - iv. Lacks the power to declare laws unconstitutional, but may rule that usages are "incompatible" with UK or EU rules on human rights
- g. The Parties
 - i. Britain's parties started in seventeenth century as Whigs and Tories
 1. More cohesive than American parties
 2. More ideological than American parties
 - ii. Majority party controls Commons and forms government
 - iii. Labour party favors nationalization, welfare measures, and higher taxes
 - iv. Conservatives favor less government involvement and lower taxes
 - v. Liberal Democrats are left of Labour on some questions
 1. British electoral system ("first past the post") disadvantages third parties
 2. Although Liberal Democrats was one of the two big parties in the nineteenth century, it was pushed into small party status by Labour in the 1920s
 3. Needed as coalition partner after 2010, Liberal Democrats entered cabinet as junior partners
 - a. Unhappy coalition with Conservatives
 - b. Liberal Democrats got 2011 referendum to alter the electoral system ("alternative vote"), but it was rejected
 - vi. Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties have regional influence and have spurts of growth and decline
 1. Win seats due to territorial concentration
- h. Britain's Two-Party System

- i. Two-plus party system
 - 1. Two dominant parties
 - 2. Some Third parties are still important
 - a. Liberal Democrats win enough votes to force both Labour and Conservatives to make concessions
 - b. Overall, the electoral system still penalizes smaller parties
 - 3. Single-member districts
 - a. Also called “first past the post” because a candidate can win with a plurality rather than a majority of votes
 - b. Tends to produce two large parties
 - c. Opposite effect of proportional representation electoral systems
- IV. British Political Culture
 - a. Tied to social class, although less now than in the past
 - b. British upper and middle classes pass on their advantage to their children starting with “public” school (actually private and expensive)
 - i. 7% of Britons attend “public” school yet 40% of those entering Oxford and Cambridge went to “public” school
 - ii. More than half of Conservative MPs went to “public” school, but fewer Labor MPs did
 - iii. Half of Conservative MPs were educated at Oxford or Cambridge, while “only” a quarter of Labour MPs were
 - iv. A class divide still exists and politics are still driven by a very small elite
 - c. British education opened up following WWII, but this has had a limited effect on national leadership
 - d. Geography: Social class related to geography, both predict voting
 - i. Disadvantaged, lower class, urban, Scottish, and Welsh tend to Labour
 - ii. Upper class, suburban, and rural English tend to Conservatives
 - e. Class voting, once the strongest in Britain, has weakened due to additional factors:
 - i. Effective governance
 - ii. Sentimental attachment to party
 - iii. Immigration
 - iv. Low tax promises
 - v. High economic growth
 - vi. Education
 - f. British civility
 - i. Ingrained but weakened post-WWII
 - ii. Affects public life as well as political interactions
 - g. Pragmatism
 - i. Judgments based on practice and results rather than theory
 - ii. British political culture is generally more pragmatic than ideological
 - h. Traditions and symbols define public life
 - i. Legitimacy
 - i. British system enjoys high legitimacy
 - 1. This means that Britons perceive their government’s rule to be rightful
 - ii. Threats to British legitimacy
 - 1. Years of violence in Northern Ireland (Ulster)
 - j. A Changing Political Culture
 - i. Political culture changes (Almond and Verba’s *Civic Culture*)
 - ii. Characterization of Britain as a “deferential civil culture” (Almond and Verba) has been invalid for decades
 - iii. World War II illuminated some latent changes in the British political culture

V. Patterns of Interaction

- a. Relationship between citizens and parties
 - i. Party image is what party projects
 - ii. Party identification is what voters carry in their heads
- b. 2010 Elections
 - i. “Hung parliament” necessitated coalition between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats
 - ii. Labour suffered from Blair’s support for Iraq War
- c. National and Local Party
 - i. National party most powerful
 - ii. Still have to negotiate with local constituency parties for candidates
 - iii. National parties assign “safe seats” to top party figures
 - 1. Result: a minority of MPs are actually from the constituency that they represent
 - 2. Party is more important than the particular characteristics of MPs
 - iv. Large catchall parties must manage many views within the party, leading to much intra-party politics
 - v. Parties are influenced by interest groups and trade unions
- d. National parties engage in routine interaction
 - i. Prime Minister’s Question Hour
- e. The Cabinet
 - i. Minsters (secretaries)
 - ii. Undersecretaries

VI. What Britons Quarrel About

- a. Financial crisis intensified many of these debates
 - i. Post-WWII, Britain on the economic decline for decades
 - ii. Turned around by Thatcher’s market economics in 1980s
 - iii. Few understood Cameron’s austerity measures
- b. Devolution for Scotland and Wales
 - i. Now have own parliaments and some regional powers
 - ii. 2014 Scottish referendum on independence failed
- c. National Healthcare
 - i. Labour supported
 - ii. Conservatives and British Medical Association fought implementation but lost
 - iii. Healthier population but skyrocketing costs
- d. Britain’s Racial Problems
 - i. Immigration from British colonies after WWII
 - ii. Some violence between whites and nonwhites and Muslims
- e. Britain and Europe
 - i. Britons have historically not seen themselves as Europeans and many still do not
 - ii. Joined the EU but not the euro
 - iii. Traditionally been “euroskeptics”

Chapter Summary

Britain did not turn democratic suddenly, as occurred in France and the U.S. Rather, beginning with the Magna Carta, British democracy developed and evolved over time. The gradual democratization, combined with the geographic isolation of Britain, was historically and politically unique and difficult to copy elsewhere. This chapter explores that evolutionary democratization and places Britain’s institutions in this context. In particular, the feudal nobles limited central monarchical power. Over time, kingly power declined while Parliament’s increased, especially in the area of tax revenues to fight wars. Other

events also empowered Parliament: the English Civil War, the Glorious Revolution, and changing class structure, a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. The creation of working and middle classes led to political parties and the eventual enfranchisement of broader segments of the population which led to the rise of the welfare state. The size and cost of the welfare state is still at the center of British politics.

This chapter introduces various political institutions, namely the relationship between monarch (head of state), the cabinet, the prime minister (chief of government), the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the Supreme Court. Their various powers and relationships are put into context and compared to presidential systems. American students may be unfamiliar with the role of PM, cabinet, and backbenchers. Also important and different is British party discipline, its sources and influence on prime ministers and their ability to pass legislation. Important for comparative purposes is the growing power of the prime minister, which tends to become more presidential relative to the cabinet and Commons. This evolution is controversial since Commons is the only directly elected institution. A stronger Commons and weaker Lords is a consequence of the direct election of the former. The effect of a more powerful prime minister in Britain and elsewhere poses questions about democracy. The key distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems is that the former is a fusion of powers between the legislative and executive, not a separation of powers. Students learn the advantages and disadvantages of both political systems, especially their stability and flexibility.

Britain's main political parties—Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats—are explored: their basic ideological positions, party images, types of members, and their evolution. The two-plus party system is described and contrasted with two-party and multi-party systems. The discussion of the relationship between electoral systems and number of relevant parties is valuable. This relationship, along with placing parties on an ideological spectrum, is important for students' understanding of the remaining chapters. Finally, the need for a coalition government following the 2010 parliamentary election examines the logic behind coalition formation as well as its implication for governance and ideological compatibility of the parties involved.

The effects of British political culture are substantial. Although evolving, political culture still influences the way in which business is conducted within and between parties. It has also impacted party images and party identification. Finally, there are various levels at which the components of the British political system interact: national and local parties, cabinet and ministries, interest groups and parties, and individual citizens and parties. These are all examined in light of their overall effect on the British political system and their effect on the major debates (such as healthcare, devolution, racial and religious tensions, and European identity).

Lecture Starters

- Why study Britain first? Why not another country?
- Name five things that you knew, or thought you knew, about the British political system before reading this chapter.
- Name five things that you learned from this chapter that you did not previously know.
- What powers does each political institution possess? Specifically, the monarch, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Supreme Court, the cabinet, and the prime minister?

Discussion Questions

- Based on the discussion of the British system, what are the main differences between presidential and parliamentary systems?
- What does it mean for the legislative and executive branches to be fused? In what system is this the case?
- How did British democracy come about? Was it a radical shift or a gradual process?
- What are three documents and/or events that led to creation of British democracy as we know it?
- What institution is the most powerful in the British political system? Does one particular person possess a disproportionate amount of power?
- Which is the only directly elected political institution (at the national level) in the British political system?
- How has geography influenced the development of the British state and British democracy?
- What is common law? How does it differ from code law?

Activities

- Undergraduates have an extremely difficult time identifying the most important points among a large amount of information. To get them beyond simply memorizing boldface terms, ask them to do a “power diagram” for each country. They should include all official institutions of the political system and then use arrows to demonstrate relationships and the direction of power. Avoid “how a bill becomes a law” sorts of analysis but take into account to whom each institution is accountable, what overall powers they have, etc. Hint: Have them do this in Microsoft Word (or a comparable program) and utilize the SmartArt option.
- Assign pairs of students a “mini research project” that has them choose one democratic country and explore how democracy came about there. Then ask them how this differed in Britain. Have each group share their democratization summaries and comparisons with the class. Ask students to identify similarities and differences across countries but to focus most of their attention on these experiences in relation to the British experience. Finally, ask them what lessons might be learned concerning the contemporary democratization of countries. Their research can be conducted outside of class, or you can combine it with a library familiarization session and make it an in-class activity.
- Extending the previous activity, you can have students locate one or two news articles that reference the current state of democracy in any given country and reflect on these experiences in relation to those of Britain. A good comparison is Russia, as you can pose questions such as: “Just because some Western audiences do not consider Russia to be a democracy yet, does that mean that they are not on the path to democracy?” or “Based on the experience of Britain, is the standard for democracy that is applied to Russia a fair one?”

Teaching Suggestions

Of all the countries studied in a comparative politics course, students are most comfortable with the British system. That being said, their understanding of that system is rarely as accurate as they think. As a result of this “familiarity” and the parallels that can be drawn from the American system, the British political system serves as a building block for most comparative politics classes. Therefore, it is important to resist the urge to gloss over a system that we assume most understand and instead spend perhaps even more time on the British system than those that follow. Specifically, use the British system to introduce and ground students’ understanding of the basic concepts such as presidential systems, parliamentary systems, legislature, parliament, upper house, lower house, electoral system, party discipline, vote of no-confidence, cabinet, government, etc. If you make sure that they correctly apply these terms for this first section, then everyone will be much happier later on. Also, it is essential to understand Britain so that the rest of your discussions can build off of these institutions, and students will learn to comfortably *compare* systems the rest of the semester.

Finally, this chapter is a lot for students to take in. Introductory level students, especially, are likely to miss the connections between the various sections. As is true for the rest of this text as well, I would encourage you to reinforce the links between history, culture, political culture, economics, political institutions, and political issues. Encouraging students to constantly think in terms of cause and effect will help them then recognize the causal relationships between these topics.

REVEL Assets

- **2.2 Describe how Britain’s electoral system—single-member districts with plurality— influences their two-plus party system.**
- Activity: Comparing Legislatures
- Activity: Comparing Judiciaries
- **2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.**
- Reading: Russell Brand, Ed Miliband and the Search for a Popular Left
- **2.5 Compare recent political quarrels in Britain to those in the United States.**
- Reading: Investing in Britain—Manufacturing: Nissan Has Led Renaissance in Car Production
- Video: David Cameron Speech on Well Being
- Reading: The Insider Who Must Lead the NHS Back to National Health
- Activity: You Are a Citizen of Europe

True/False Questions

1. British democracy came about swiftly through a major revolution much like the one in France.

Answer: False

Topic: Introduction

Learning Objective: n/a

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

2. The British House of Commons is more powerful than the House of Lords.

Answer: True

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

3. A key difference between parliamentary and presidential systems is that the legislative and executive branches are fused in a presidential system.

Answer: False

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

4. Countries with a majoritarian, or first past the post, electoral system, tend to have two major parties.

Answer: True

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

5. Great Britain is a pure meritocracy.

Answer: False

Topic: British Political Culture

Learning Objective: LO 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

6. According to Hobbes, people initially submitted themselves to the will of monarchs because the state of nature was so terrible and insecure.

Answer: True

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

7. British cabinet ministers are elected by the general public and frequently disagree with each other concerning matters of public policy.

Answer: False

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

8. Britain has a two-plus party system.

Answer: True

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

9. The prime minister is the head of state in Britain.

Answer: False

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

10. The Swedish welfare state is much more expansive than the British welfare state.

Answer: True

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

Multiple-Choice Questions

11. Which of the following was the first step in the development of British democracy?
- a. the Glorious Revolution
 - b. the Magna Carta
 - c. the creation of the House of Lords
 - d. the beheading of Charles I

Answer: b

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

12. In 2014, which region narrowly voted against independence?
- a. Northern Ireland
 - b. England
 - c. Wales
 - d. Scotland

Answer: d

Topic: What Britons Quarrel About

Learning Objective: LO 2.5 Compare recent political quarrels in Britain to those in the United States.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

13. Which of the following best describes Britain's Constitution?
- a. It is a brief document very similar to the U.S. Constitution.
 - b. It is a series of documents and customs that provides considerable flexibility.
 - c. It is one long but detailed document.
 - d. It is an oral tradition that has been passed down over generations.

Answer: b

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

14. The British legal system uses _____.

- a. Common Law
- b. Code Law
- c. Civil Law
- d. Roman Law

Answer: a

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

15. What type of electoral system does Britain have?

- a. proportional representation
- b. minority representation
- c. single transferable vote
- d. first past the post

Answer: d

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

16. In Britain, the head of government is the _____ and the head of state is the _____.

- a. king or queen; president
- b. king or queen; prime minister
- c. president; prime minister
- d. prime minister; king or queen

Answer: d

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

17. Who picks and controls the cabinet?

- a. Parliament
- b. the king or queen
- c. the prime minister
- d. the chancellor of the exchequer

Answer: a

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

18. What are the three most influential parties in the House of Commons?

- a. Conservative, Labour, and Tory
- b. Tory, Labour, and Liberal Democratic
- c. Christian Democratic, Labour, and Liberal
- d. Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democratic

Answer: d

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

19. Which two British parties would be least likely to support changing to a proportional representation electoral system?

- a. Liberal Democratic and Labour
- b. Social Democratic and Labour
- c. Conservative and Liberal Democratic
- d. Labour and Conservative

Answer: d

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Difficult

20. What event had the biggest impact on the enfranchisement of the majority of British citizens?

- a. the Industrial Revolution
- b. World War I
- c. World War II
- d. the enactment of the Magna Carta

Answer: a

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

21. Which of the following is the upper house of the British parliament that can delay, though not block, statutes passed by the lower house?

- a. House of Lords
- b. Senate
- c. House of Commons
- d. National Assembly

Answer: a

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

22. Which of the following is the most powerful institution in the British political system?

- a. the queen
- b. the House of Lords
- c. the House of Commons
- d. the Senate

Answer: c

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

23. British citizens' human rights are protected through _____.

- a. the British Bill of Rights
- b. informal agreements
- c. a British law that adopted the European Convention on Human Rights
- d. the British Constitution of 1646

Answer: c

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

24. In Britain, one of the monarch's most important roles is to _____.
a. initiate legislation
b. veto legislation
c. implement laws
d. serve as the "psychological cement" for the country

Answer: d

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

25. Which British political party pushed to have a referendum in 2011 that would have implemented an "alternative vote" or "instant runoff" electoral system?
a. Labour
b. Scottish Nationalist
c. Conservative
d. Liberal Democratic

Answer: d

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

26. Under which of the following circumstances would the Liberal Democrats win more seats?
a. if its members were more geographically concentrated
b. if it took very conservative positions
c. if it appealed to a smaller segment of the population
d. if it encouraged independence movements or formed coalitions with larger parties

Answer: a

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Difficult

27. Which of the following is evidence that the British class divide has lessened moderately since World War II?

- a. Fewer lower income students are enrolled in “public” schools such as Eaton.
- b. The vast majority of all MPs have been educated in government-funded primary and secondary schools.
- c. Fewer MPs are Oxbridge educated.
- d. There are fewer members of the House of Lords.

Answer: d

Topic: British Political Culture

Learning Objective: LO 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

28. Members of which of the following groups are most likely to vote for the British Labour Party?

- a. suburban residents
- b. upper class
- c. rural residents
- d. working class

Answer: d

Topic: British Political Culture

Learning Objective: LO 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

29. Which of the following issues is most likely to be used by the Conservative Party to woo working-class voters away from the Labour Party?

- a. increased immigration to get cheaper labor
- b. lower taxes
- c. more generous social welfare programs
- d. increased government spending

Answer: b

Topic: British Political Culture

Learning Objective: LO 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

30. If British citizens believe their government’s rule is rightful, they believe the government _____.

- a. has authority
- b. is legitimate
- c. is sovereign
- d. is powerful

Answer: b

Topic: British Political Culture

Learning Objective: LO 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

31. The psychological attachment of a voter to a particular party is called _____.
a. party image
b. party allegiance
c. party identification
d. ideology

Answer: c

Topic: Patterns of Interaction

Learning Objective: LO 2.4 Explain why no country can be completely democratic.

Skill Level: Remember the Facts

Difficulty Level: Easy

32. What party image does the Conservative Party aim to convey?
a. helping people through market intervention
b. helping people through social and educational reforms
c. producing economic growth through hard work with little state intervention
d. reducing economic inequality by correcting flaws in the free market

Answer: c

Topic: Patterns of Interaction

Learning Objective: LO 2.4 Explain why no country can be completely democratic.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

33. If no party wins the majority of seats in Parliament, as was the case in Britain in 2010, how can a government be formed?
a. The party with the most seats forms the government.
b. The upper legislative house chooses the government.
c. New elections are automatically called.
d. At least two parties make a coalition government.

Answer: d

Topic: Patterns of Interaction

Learning Objective: LO 2.4 Explain why no country can be completely democratic.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

34. The British government's legitimacy is lowest in _____.
a. London
b. Ulster
c. the European Union
d. labor unions

Answer: b

Topic: British Political Culture

Learning Objective: LO 2.3 Illustrate the several ways that social class influences British politics.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

35. Which is the most powerful British ministry?

- a. International Development
- b. Defense Ministry
- c. Treasury
- d. Education

Answer: c

Topic: Patterns of Interaction

Learning Objective: LO 2.4 Explain why no country can be completely democratic.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate

Essay Questions

36. How has Britain's geography influence its political development? Cite specific examples in your answer.

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Difficult

37. Discuss at least two differences between presidential and parliamentary systems. Use the U.S. and Britain for tangible examples.

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Moderate

38. Which institution is the most powerful in the British system? What makes it so powerful? Discuss the relative powers of each major political institution in your answer.

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Difficult

39. Discuss the process by which Britain became democratic. Given the experience of Britain, do you think nondemocratic countries such as Russia will eventually democratize?

Topic: Impact of the Past

Learning Objective: LO 2.1 Contrast gradual historical change in Britain with tumultuous change in France.

Skill Level: Apply What You Know

Difficulty Level: Difficult

40. Describe the British constitution. In light of the experiences of Britain, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of an unwritten constitution. If you were establishing a new country, would you choose a written or unwritten constitution? Explain.

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Analyze It

Difficulty Level: Difficult

41. Describe the British political parties.

Topic: The Key Institutions

Learning Objective: LO 2.2 Describe how Britain's electoral system—single-member districts with plurality—influences their two-plus party system.

Skill Level: Understand the Concepts

Difficulty Level: Moderate