

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

SUMMER IN LONDON 2019

BRITISH POLITICS

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course provides an introduction to British politics, and therefore carries no previous political science requirements. It will provide an introduction to the study of politics, focusing predominantly on the British system of government and the historical processes that have shaped modern Britain. The topics include theories of the state, parties and party systems, central government, nationalism, devolution, the Northern Ireland question, 'Brexit' and Britain's awkward relationship with the European Union. The course topics will be approached from a theoretical and historical perspective in the lectures, and applied to analysis of current British politics in the classes.

CORE TEXTS

You should purchase the following core textbook for this course:

- B. Jones, P. Norton & O. Daddow *Politics UK*, (London, Pearson Education Ltd, 2018) NINTH EDITION.

The following is also recommended for more detailed analysis of some core issues:

- R. Heffernan, C. Hay, M. Russell & P. Cowley (eds.), *Developments in British Politics 10*, (Palgrave, 2016), tenth edition, ISBN: 978-1-137-49474-0R.

The following may also be useful:

P. Norton's *The British Polity* provides a good introduction to the subject.

S. George, I. Bache and S. Bulmer, *Politics in the European Union* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011) provides a good overview of the European Union.

V. Bogdanor, *The New British Constitution* (Hart, 2009) is a useful source for current debates on the Constitution.

T. Bingham, *The Rule of Law* (Penguin, 2011) is a good introduction to the role of the judiciary in public policy

THE MASS MEDIA

You are **required** to read at least one English quality paper daily, as analysis of current events in class will otherwise be impossible. Roughly, in terms of political viewpoint, from right to left these are: *the Daily Telegraph*, *the Times*, *The Independent* (only available online) and *the Guardian*.

The Economist provides a good weekly overview and analysis. The Senate House Library holds back issues.

THE INTERNET

The political parties have web-sites, as do all UK papers (*The Times* has a paywall). The European Union Web-site is worth visiting (www.europa.eu.int) as is the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>).

GRADING, COURSE-WORK AND EXAMS

Paper: 40%

You will be required to write a paper of between 2,000 and 2,500 words long. The essay questions are set out below. All citations should be cited in full, e.g. as a footnote in the following form.¹ Please include a bibliography of works consulted.

The paper will be due at the beginning of week 6.

Exam 40%

The Course features a final exam. You will be asked to answer 2 essay questions in one hour.

Class Presentations and Participation: 20%

You will be asked to do a short class presentation during the term, and to provide brief accounts of the week's developments in British politics. The class participation grade reflects these assignments as well as overall performance in class. All students are expected to contribute to class discussions on a weekly basis.

No Unexplained absences are permitted from this class. If unexplained absences occur they may have an impact on your class participation mark.

¹ S. George, *Politics and Policy in the European Union* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Please make sure you answer the questions. If you wish to write on another topic, please arrange this in advance.

1. Are there any meaningful ideological differences between the two main British political parties?
2. "The House of Commons is little more than a talking-shop" - discuss.
3. "The Prime Minister is only as strong as his or her colleagues allow him or her to be" - discuss.
4. Do strong interest groups cause bad government?
5. Will devolution lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom?
6. "Membership of the European Union undermined British sovereignty" - discuss.
7. "The doctrine of Parliamentary Sovereignty means that the judiciary is powerless to check the executive" - discuss.
8. Would Britain benefit from codifying its constitution?

SECTION ONE: THE BRITISH STATE

WEEK I: INTRODUCTION: THE WESTMINSTER MODEL

Essential Reading

B. Jones “The changing context of UK politics”, chapter 1 from *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

A. Gamble ‘What’s British about British Politics?’ in *Developments 10*

WEEK II: A) PARLIAMENT

Essential Reading

P. Norton, “The House of Commons at work”, chapter 16 from *Politics UK*.

P. Norton, “The House of Commons under pressure”, chapter 17 from *Politics UK*.

P. Norton, “The House of Lords”, chapter 18 from *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

M. Russell ‘Parliament: A significant restraint on Government’ in *Developments 10*

WEEK II: B) THE CONSTITUTION

Class discussion topic:

Would Britain benefit from a codified constitution?

Essential Reading

P. Norton, “The Changing Constitution”, chapter 14 from *Politics UK*.

P. Norton, “The Crown”, chapter 15 from *Politics UK*.

WEEK III: A) POLITICAL PARTIES AND IDEOLOGY AND VOTING IN THE UK

Class discussion topic:

What do the two main British political parties stand for? Are there any significant differences between them?

Essential Reading

B. Jones, "Defining the Political World", Chapters 4 - 7 from *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

M. Kenny 'Ideological politics and the party system' in *Developments 10*

P. Webb 'The Party System: turbulent multi-partyism or Duopolistic Competition?' In *Developments 10*

P. Cowley 'Political recruitment and the political class' in *Developments 10*

WEEK III: B) THE MYTH AND REALITY OF CABINET GOVERNMENT

Class Discussion topic:

Are British Prime Ministers more powerful than American Presidents?

Essential Reading

P. Norton, "The Core Executive: Prime Ministers and Cabinet", chapter 19 from *Politics UK*.

P. Norton, "Ministers, departments and civil servants", chapter 20 from *Politics UK*

Other Reading

B. Yong and T. Bale 'Britain's Experience of Coalition Government: Continuity and Change' in *Developments 10*

WEEK IV: A) MINISTERS, CIVIL SERVANTS AND LOBBYISTS

Class discussion topic:

Would British democracy and public policy benefit from a growth in political lobbying?

Essential Reading

B. Jones, "The policy-making process" chapter 23 from *Politics UK*.

B. Jones, "Pressure Groups" chapter 11 from *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

C. Haddon 'Developments in the Civil Service' in *Developments 10*

M. Grasso 'Political Participation' in *Developments 10*

SECTION TWO: CHALLENGES TO THE BRITISH STATE

WEEK IV: B) BRITAIN AND EU: AN AWKWARD PARTNER?

Class Discussion Topic:

Has EU membership undermined British sovereignty?

Essential Reading

M. Holmes, "Britain and the the EU", chapter 28 from *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

A. Geddes 'Britain beyond the European Union' in *Developments 10*

WEEK V: A) JUDICIARY AND THE BRITISH STATE

Class Discussion topic:

Should the Courts be made more powerful in the British political system?

Essential Reading

P. Norton, "The Judiciary", chapter 22 from *Politics UK*.

**WEEK V: B) NATIONALISM: SCOTTISH & WELSH DEVOLUTION;
NORTHERN IRELAND**

Class discussion topics:

Is devolution likely to lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom?

Is genuine democracy possible in a divided society like Northern Ireland?

Essential Reading

R. Deacon, "Devolution", chapter 13 from *Politics UK*.

Other Reading

C. Jeffery 'The United Kingdom after the Scottish Referendum' in *Developments*
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WEEK VI: A) TRIP TO PARLIAMENT

WEEK VI: B) FINAL EXAM