

SGI Sustainable
Governance
Indicators

2015 United Kingdom Report

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Executive Summary

Recovering from the steep recession of 2008 – 2010 has been the United Kingdom's main policy challenge over the past four years. The coalition government formed in 2010 put getting the British economy back on track at the heart of its policy agenda and set out a medium-term strategy for rendering the public finances sustainable. This has involved striking a balance in macroeconomic policy between fiscal consolidation (thereby mitigating the risk that financial markets push up the financing costs of a rising public debt) and an excessively austere fiscal policy that risks engendering a vicious cycle similar to that experienced in some southern European countries. Although it has taken longer than the government anticipated for these measures to bear fruit – with the result that public finances have not improved as quickly as planned – markets continue to show confidence in the government's policies. Very low interest rates and a large program of quantitative easing (bond purchases) by the Bank of England have helped to counter the negative impulses of the stagnation in the euro zone. The stability of the banking system has gradually improved as the two large banks that received massive injections of public funding in 2008/9 have shrunk their balance sheets and bolstered their capital, but scandals in the sector have continued to crop up. Employment has grown to reach an all-time high despite job losses in the public sector – a trend that is seen as something of a puzzle given the lack of GDP growth until 2013 – but relatively high rates of youth unemployment, cuts in wages and the worsening working and social conditions of some groups are causes for concern.

In the field of governance, the government's massive digital-surveillance program and the harsh and dramatic attempts to prevent the press from reporting about it give reasons for concern with regard to the UK government's appreciation of civil rights and media freedom. On the other hand, the fact that the government was ultimately unable to stop the newspapers from reporting on the issue indicates the continuing presence of a courageous and independent press.

Although coalition governments have been rare in British politics, the current government has functioned surprisingly smoothly, and the flexibility of the United Kingdom's governance institutions has been demonstrated by the comparative ease with which they have adapted to this novel political context.

However, both partners have also faced threats of being damaged by being part of the coalition, with a particularly sharp drop in poll ratings for the Liberal Democrats (the junior partner). Political dissent has been triggered by opposition to the European Union and to immigration, resulting in electoral successes for the UK Independence Party, which campaigns on precisely these issues. This is especially difficult for the Conservative Party – the senior government-coalition partner – because its own center of gravity has become more euroskeptical, forcing the prime minister to walk a tightrope between being seen to do something about the perceived excesses of the European Union while remaining constructive in the context of EU partnerships.

The unexpectedly close outcome of the referendum on Scottish independence may have saved the Union for now, but it also forced Westminster politicians to accept the devolution of further powers to the Scottish Parliament, including in the area of taxation. It has further strengthened the Scottish National Party and weakened the Labour Party in its former stronghold. Thus, although the government has ultimately been successful in implementing its policies, the past five years of coalition government has fostered the fragmentation of the United Kingdom's political landscape and increased pressure on the traditional two-party system, making a further coalition government more likely in the 2015 general election.

Although the government has continued to introduce measures that undoubtedly make its activities more open and transparent, it has also been criticized for the extent of the surveillance revealed by the Snowden leaks and for an apparent willingness to curb media freedoms in response to the recommendations of the Leveson report into the culture, practice and ethics of the press. The media nevertheless remain largely free and do not hesitate to be critical of government shortcomings, for example in the conduct of policy towards migrants.

Overall, the United Kingdom continues to exhibit sustainable governance. The absence of a formal constitution is a defining feature of the United Kingdom. Unlike other countries where such processes are more firmly rooted in the legal framework, there is a degree of informality in many areas of governance in the United Kingdom. In meeting the significant economic and political challenges of the last years, the flexibility of the UK system of governance has generally been helpful.

Key Challenges

The two trends that have had the greatest economic and political effects on the United Kingdom in recent years have been the struggle to emerge from the economic crisis of the last five years and the increasing pressure on the traditional two-party system. The imbalances within the UK economy are slowly being resolved, and since the start of 2013, the country has demonstrated better economic performance than most of its EU partners. However, vulnerabilities remain, notably the need to deal with a sharply increased level of public debt, lackluster productivity growth, and a growing balance-of-payments deficit, specifically on the current account. Recovery in the areas of GDP and employment has not been matched by corresponding improvements in wages, which are only now starting to rise in real terms, leading to popular resentment of policies that are perceived by many to have rescued banks without doing enough for ordinary citizens. Certain longstanding problems such as housing shortages and high prices in prosperous areas, as well as congested, run-down and outdated infrastructure, need attention. Some welfare reforms have put pressure on the living standards of low-income households, and the next government will have to address the challenge of preventing these households from falling farther behind while going further in consolidating the public finances. The United Kingdom's public debt is still rising, and is expected to peak in 2015 at 89.4% of GDP, while the budget deficit, at 6.5% of GDP, is decreasing more slowly than the chancellor of the exchequer had hoped, partly because of lower than expected tax revenues. Maintaining a commitment to curb deficits during the next parliament will be demanding.

The coalition government held together as well as could reasonably be expected, but showed increasing tensions as the 2015 general election approached. Economic recovery served as the defining objective of the coalition, and at the time of writing, it appeared that the outcome of the election would depend largely on how well the incumbent government was able to focus the public debate on the economic recovery of the past five years. A large program of quantitative easing by the Bank of England has meant that financing the deficit has not been costly for the government, but low interest rates have had significant distributive effects between savers and borrowers. One of the uncertainties hanging over the economy is the question of how the quantitative easing program will be wound down. But the problems the economy faces are still formidable.

While the British voting system makes it difficult to predict the outcome of the 2015 election, it is clear that the traditional party system is under considerable pressure, and that the more established parties will have to find ways of accommodating a more diverse range of smaller parties. Current public debate is dominated by the populist UK Independence Party (UKIP) and its anti-EU, anti-immigrant agenda. This poses problems for the other political parties. The Conservatives have not yet found a convincing response to this new threat on their right, while UKIP recently celebrated the election of their first two MPs – both Conservative defectors. For now, the Conservatives seem to have entered a race to the bottom many consider futile in an attempt to win back their right-wing voters. This threatens to antagonize some of their supporters in the business community, which broadly, though far from unanimously, advocates staying in a reformed European Union. The opposition Labour Party, however, has proved unable to profit from the weakness of its opponents, and has suffered from turmoil in its Scottish branch following the referendum on independence.

Other challenges facing the United Kingdom include completing and above all implementing financial-sector regulatory reform, ensuring that the country's electricity-generating capacity is renewed, recalibrating the welfare state, and dealing with the funding challenges facing the health service. Banks are simultaneously being urged to lend more and shore up their capital base, which many have been doing by increasing intermediation margins. However, lending to SMEs in particular is still slow. For the welfare state, major issues include whether and at what level to cap household benefits and whether all the benefits currently provided to all pensioners can be maintained in the face of rising welfare costs.

Despite the breadth of the reform agenda, the sustainability of governance in the United Kingdom is not in doubt. However, there are various political uncertainties. Britain has long had a substantial global role, but finds itself at something of a crossroads. Close links with the United States are always valued and the proposed transatlantic trade and investment partnership would resonate with British preferences, but British links with emerging-market economies also need more attention. While it is traditionally the health service and the economy that dominate election politics, resolving the increasing disaffection with the European Union and finding a coherent message on the issue of immigration will remain significant challenges for the United Kingdom and all its parties.

Policy Performance

I. Economic Policies

Economy

Economic Policy
Score: 8

The UK economic framework was substantially reformed after 1979 in a market-friendly direction and most of these reforms were maintained after the election of the Labour government in 1997, albeit with some rebalancing towards labor interests – notably through the introduction of a minimum wage. The UK economy grew steadily from the early 1990s up to 2007, but hindsight suggests that the underlying economic model depended too much on consumer demand and on an increasingly risk-prone financial sector. An independent central bank and a golden rule for public finances were supposed to establish macroeconomic stability, but proved to be too easy for the government to manipulate. The resulting high degree of deindustrialization and low level of manufacturing output led to a strong emphasis on the financial sector which contributed substantially both to government revenues, employment, and the country's balance of payments.

Because of the financial sector's increased share in the economy, the United Kingdom was badly hit by the financial crisis that began in 2007 and has since been struggling to deal with the aftermath. Taxes on the banking and consumer sectors fell, public expenditure rose and public finances also had to support vulnerable banks.

The change in government in 2010 led to the adoption of an economic policy framework ostensibly focused on budgetary consolidation, but in reality the squeeze on public spending has been less than is often claimed because the government chose to exempt key areas such as health spending. The corollary, especially as the government debt rose, adding to debt service charges, was that cuts in other areas of public spending had to be very deep, and were therefore politically highly contested. Nevertheless, the markets have accepted that the UK economy is on a sustainable trajectory, aided by the very loose

monetary policy maintained by the Bank of England.

Despite critical assessments from the likes of the IMF early in 2013, the economic strategy is bearing fruit: GDP growth is projected to be 3.2% in 2014, while the unemployment rate fell below 6.0% in November 2014 and employment has reached an all-time high. However, there are concerns about the rising current-account deficit and about the number of households facing poverty despite the employment of at least one member. The next government will face continuing pressure to rebalance the economy.

Labor Markets

Labor Market
Policy
Score: 7

After a period of remarkably good and stable labor-market performance in which the rate of unemployment was below that of the euro zone and even that of the OECD average, conditions in the United Kingdom deteriorated in the wake of the 2008 crisis and the ensuing economic downturn. Underlying weaknesses (such as the comparatively high degree of working age inactivity linked to the high number of claimants of disability-related benefits) have come to the fore, and the unemployment rate rose to its highest rate since the mid-1990s. But after labor-market flexibility was increased through deregulation and the lowering of secondary-wage costs, the unemployment rate fell significantly from 8.3% at the end of 2012 to 6.0% in October 2014, with the youth unemployment rate down to 16.0%. The UK labor market continues to attract substantial numbers of economic migrants.

There is a flip side to the strong employment figures in a period of significant economic adjustment, however. Real wages fell in the aftermath of the crisis in the United Kingdom, and have only recently started to increase again. There has been considerable controversy around so-called zero-hour contracts, under which an employee is not guaranteed specific paid work hours, as well as over the increasing use of unpaid internships for young people entering the labor market. In particular, these contracts are felt to discriminate against vulnerable workers, although as Brinkley (2013) argues, relatively few workers are subject to these contracts and some in fact choose them. Landlords tend not to accept zero-hour contracts as collateral, which puts further pressure on the affected workers and worsens their situation within the housing market. The sustainability of the government's reforms thus still needs to be proven.

Citation:

Brinkley, I. (2013) "Flexibility or insecurity? Exploring the rise of zero-hours contracts" London: The Work Foundation

Taxes

Tax Policy
Score: 6

The United Kingdom has a progressive income-tax system and a balance between direct and indirect taxation that is regarded as reasonably fair from the perspective of horizontal equity. The system is, however, criticized for its complexity. In relation to vertical equity, there are too many opportunities for tax avoidance, with the results bordering on evasion for the rich. Property taxes are high, but labor taxes are low compared with many other EU countries.

The financial crisis and the ensuing economic downturn cut revenues sharply, and the squeeze on wages is blamed for aggravating a shortfall in revenue. In part, however, the shortfall is attributable to the government's reluctance to raise taxes and its decision to ease the income-tax burden by raising the personal allowance and cutting the top tax rate. The size of the fiscal deficit suggests that sufficiency is currently in doubt, but the tax system should be expected to perform quite well when recovery, notably in wages, takes hold.

Citation:

World Economic Forum 2012: The Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013.

Budgets

Budgetary Policy
Score: 6

The United Kingdom is a highly centralized state which puts the government in a powerful position to exert control over budgetary policy. Most spending is directly or indirectly controlled from Whitehall, and there are few other influences compared to, for example, federal countries. This also means, however, that the central government has to shoulder the blame if things go wrong.

During most of the New Labour government, the "golden rule" was the guiding of UK fiscal policy, limiting deficit spending to investment over the business cycle. However, public spending was rising as a proportion of GDP during the 2000s, and can now be judged to have been too pro-cyclical. In 2009, adherence to fiscal rules was abandoned to cope with the consequences of the crisis. In 2010, the new coalition government implemented a strict fiscal austerity program to focus on consolidation instead of boosting the economy. It also created the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to assess fiscal policy independently.

Although the budget deficit is declining, fiscal consolidation is happening more slowly than the government planned, and public debt has soared in the

meantime. However, markets have been kind to the United Kingdom, with low financing costs (helped by very loose monetary policy), and this can, within reason, be interpreted to mean that the public finances are sustainable. It is generally recognized that the victor in the 2015 election will face renewed pressures to consolidate the public finances, and that if interest rates rise and the Bank of England starts to unwind its quantitative easing, there could be tensions for budgetary policy.

Research and Innovation

R&I Policy
Score: 8

The United Kingdom's tradition of being active player in research and innovation dates back to the Industrial Revolution. The country's clusters of pre-eminent universities have for a long time played an important role in linking cutting-edge academic research with industries such as biotechnology or IT. Performance has been weaker in terms of overall R&D spending, which continues to fall well short of EU targets, as well as in the conversion of innovation into products and sustainable, larger-scale production that holds the potential for long-term profitability. However, it is important to emphasize that the UK economy does not have the industrial base to support a large-scale R&D effort, so it is necessary to look at other indicators such as information and communications technology (ICT) spending (which matters more for service industries), to capture a truer picture of innovation effort.

Over the decades, attempts have been made by various governments to improve that situation, linking it to weaknesses in technical education on various levels. Recent government initiatives have focused on extending tax credits for R&D, setting up regional Technology and Innovation Centres (TICs), and investing in digital infrastructure and new university research facilities. There is also a current debate about the degree to which the United Kingdom should seek to attract highly skilled immigrants, which has been muddied by a broader attempt to curb immigration that is having some effect on the willingness of foreign students to come to the United Kingdom.

While the optimism expressed in the "Innovation and Research Strategy" and the sums involved are considerable, a long-term perspective advises some caution, for similar spurts have been undertaken from time to time, dating back to the Wilson government of the 1960s. Opinions vary as to why past efforts failed. Only in the medium term will the success of this latest initiative be discernible.

Global Financial System

Stabilizing
Global Financial
Markets
Score: 7

The City of London is home to one of the world's main financial hubs and host to some of its biggest financial markets. The United Kingdom was therefore particularly affected by the downturn in financial market activity after 2008. The relatively light regulation of the City prior to 2007 can also be seen as a contributing factor to the volatility in financial markets, and a consensus subsequently emerged that capital-adequacy rules needed to be more robust. The evident economic and societal costs of the crisis have fuelled debate in Britain over financial-sector regulation and whether the country should try to become less reliant on financial markets. But governments in the United Kingdom have traditionally tried to protect the interests of the City against more intrusive regulation, be it national, European or worldwide, often arguing that the special characteristics of London as a financial center are not given sufficient attention by Brussels in particular. The Libor scandal of 2012 over the fixing of market interest rates, as well as other instances of market abuse, has both contributed to the loss of public appreciation for the financial sector and the feeling that new regulation is called for.

At the international level, the British government has taken a prominent role in attempts to improve the international regulatory framework through bodies such as the Financial Stability Board (chaired by the governor of the Bank of England) and the Bank for International Settlements. The United Kingdom has had substantial influence on EU financial reforms, both through government action and in the form of initiatives from the City of London.

II. Social Policies

Education

Education Policy
Score: 7

The coalition has continued to pursue the marketization strategy started by its New Labour predecessors in the education sector. It has liberalized school regulation so as to enable non-governmental organizations such as foundations, businesses and parent-teacher corporations to set up their own schools. This policy has been controversial within the coalition, however. The core approach of education policy is to improve performance by boosting inter-school competition, mainly through performance tables administered by the regulator, Ofsted. A concern about secondary-school exam standards led grading systems to be toughened in the last year.

Programs such as Pupil Premium are designed to encourage good schools to accept disadvantaged children, thus improving education while strengthening social cohesion. However, the socioeconomic composition of many of the country's schools still poses a significant challenge for disadvantaged students and those with an immigrant background. A Children's Commission on Poverty inquiry showed that inter-school competition has led to increasing costs for pupils and their families, as many schools try to stand out by introducing fancier uniforms, new textbooks or extravagant field trips. This in turn serves to strengthen social segregation. Cuts and reallocations in the education budget have further added to the problems of the sector.

The United Kingdom – or more accurately England, as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different systems – still has a pronounced divide between those who opt for private education (confusingly, known as public school) and those who go through the state system. There is a concern about pupils leaving school with no qualifications, and occasional alarms about certain segments of the youth population doing significantly worse than others. Exam results for late secondary pupils have been improving, but there has been an accusation that marking standards have slipped, leading the current education minister to push for tougher, more discriminating standards. Other debates concern the exercise of control by local authorities over the school system, with some attempt to weaken it, as mentioned above.

In the higher education sector, the drastic increase of tuition fees (from £3,300 to between £6,000 and £9,000 per annum) has been highly contentious. The effect on student enrolment cannot yet be assessed, although previous steps to push more of the costs of higher education from the general taxpayer to the student do not appear to have inhibited access for students from poorer backgrounds.

Citation:

WEF ranks quality of UK education system as 27th in Global Competitiveness Report 2012/13 (CH 1st, GER 20th, USA 28th, F 41st).

Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion
Policy
Score: 7

A traditional system of social class has long been very influential in British society. The overriding aim of the post-1997 New Labour governments was to combat the high degree of inequality that had developed in the United Kingdom during the 1980s and early 1990s. A number of policy initiatives were employed, ranging from tax policy to reforms of the benefit system and initiatives in the education system.

Social inclusion has also been a core aim of the coalition government's policy under the rubric of the "Big Society," a policy orientation that has delivered a mixed outcome and has been counteracted by the austerity program's cuts in housing and child benefits. The UK's Gini coefficient has fallen significantly, a common phenomenon after a grave recession, but remains relatively high compared to other OECD countries.

Following the implementation of a series of government policies, youth unemployment is finally declining, reaching a rate of 16.0% in October 2014 as compared to a general unemployment rate of 6.0%. However, the high incidence of NEETs (those not in employment, education or training), particularly in certain less prosperous cities, remains a problem, and the overall income of youths and young adults has started to fall behind the rest of the population. The ongoing housing crisis has exacerbated the situation of low-income households, and with pensioners, young adults, and the working poor in metropolitan areas having increasing difficulties making ends meet.

Despite the persistent economic inequalities, the United Kingdom has a relatively good record in promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities, and also has a relatively good record on gender equality. There has also been a discernible social shift against any form of discriminatory language or action, with a number of public figures being ostracized as a result. While there are reservations regarding the appropriate degree of multiculturalism and continuing anti-immigrant pressures, immigrants do tend to be socially more integrated than in many other countries. However the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party has lowered the political system's willingness to welcome new immigrants, even from within the EU. Legislation enabling same-sex marriage came into force in 2014.

Health

Health Policy
Score: 8

The National Health Service (NHS) remains a cornerstone of the United Kingdom's universal welfare state under the coalition government. However, a policy of reforming the system with a goal of decentralization to clinical commission groups has been controversial, and has affected all 8,000 general practices in England. Most health care provided by the NHS is free at the point of delivery, although there are charges for prescriptions and for dental treatment (with significant exceptions, e.g., no charges for prescriptions for pensioners). There is a limited private health care system.

While patient convenience may not be a central focus of NHS provision, attempts have been made to improve local healthcare by creating Health and

Well-Being Boards to bring together representatives from all social services as well as elected representatives. The NHS's quality as measured by the HDI health index is very high (0.951).

As a universal service, the NHS scores very highly in terms of inclusion. The Health and Social Act 2012 now also allows patients to choose a general practitioner without geographical restrictions.

The NHS budget was ring-fenced in the coalition's budget cuts. However, due to faster rising inflation within the NHS, a spending squeeze took place. Given that the United Kingdom spent some 8.1% of GDP on health, it must be considered highly cost-efficient given outcome indicators. Some recent incidents (including underperforming hospitals) have provoked a debate about quality that is likely to lead to managerial reform. There has also been concern about rapidly rising demand for accident and emergency services, a change that has yet to be fully explained, although there is concern that the balance between primary care by general practitioners and secondary care in hospitals is becoming inappropriate. A further concern is that integration between care services and traditional health care institutions is unsatisfactory, especially for older patients, resulting at times in "bed-blocking" in hospitals. New mental-health initiatives have been promised, but have yet to be introduced.

Families

Family Policy
Score: 8

The New Labour governments had a core goal of improving women's opportunities to combine parenting with participation in the labor market. The provision of childcare facilities and the extension of maternity leave in addition to the introduction of paternity leave have all contributed. While this was also an important goal for the Liberal Democrats, Conservatives have only recently adopted gender and women's rights issues to attract female voters. The coalition has largely continued along the lines of Labour government policies with additions like, for example, calls for companies to increase the number of women on their boards and the threat of quotas. The government has also pushed for more flexibility in work time.

Cuts in welfare spending associated with the central policy of reducing the budget deficit, however, have negatively affected some core measures, such as tax credits and welfare benefits on which women rely more than men. In particular, single mothers who statistically rely most often on social benefits have seen their situation worsened by these developments.

Pensions

Pension Policy
Score: 8

The United Kingdom has a three-pillar system in which the second (employer-based) is the mainstay of the pension system. Private pension-system funds were hardest hit by the financial crisis, and some need capital injections from employers, but this has not had a significant effect on the incomes of those already retired. New entrants into private pension schemes are being offered less attractive terms than their predecessors. The Pensions Act 2010 raised the age of state pension eligibility to 66 (from 65 for men and 60 for women). Coalition reforms have shifted pressure from pension funds to individual pensioners, and are thus likely to change living conditions for British pensioners substantially in the years to come. However, compared with many other countries, the UK pension system is fiscally sustainable.

The United Kingdom used to have a comparatively high degree of poverty among the elderly, but this has improved as pension provision has expanded, partly through specific additional payments for purposes such as winter heating. The overall figures disguise inequalities within the group of pensioners, however. Lifelong housewives, for example, fare much worse than those who have the benefit of adding occupational or private pensions to their income from the state pension system. On average, children are at a much higher risk of poverty than pensioners, whose share among the poor continues to shrink. But at the same time, they constitute the largest group just above the poverty line, indicating a tight but sufficient pension policy. Most pensioners are, however, on reasonably comfortable incomes and, if anything, recent debate has been about cutting some of the fringe benefits of better-off pensioners (such as free bus travel). To date, the government has been unwilling to tackle this issue, and has committed itself to maintaining pensioner benefits.

Integration

Integration Policy
Score: 7

Due to the country's colonial history, the United Kingdom has a large share of ethnic minorities (approximately 14% of the population), and integration has long been an important area of British policy. But while the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 imposed the general duty to promote race equality on all public authorities, the United Kingdom has not developed a formal integration program. The focus has been more on the protection of minorities than on the integration of migrants, but that is because the United Kingdom has a preference for multiculturalism. There are both regional and ethnic differences in integration, with some cities and smaller towns having concentrations of populations of distinct ethnic groups, and

tensions over access to public housing and public services in localities where recent immigrants have concentrated.

The Equality Act 2006 merged three existing bodies (including the Commission for Racial Equality) into a new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) – an umbrella organization in which ethnicity is only one of several dimensions in which it attempts to enforce integration and equality. In recent years, attempts to create a national narrative around “Britishness” were aimed at changing from an ethnocentric concept of citizenship to a more civic one. There have also been high-profile cases in which leading footballers have been publicly condemned for (mild) racist abuse of opponents.

Attempts to increase diversity representation in Parliament have been made by both major parties, and as a consequence, public life now better reflects society than it did up to two decades ago. In bodies such as the police, however, concerns remain that the representation of minority ethnic groups is too low. With an election ahead and the anti-immigrant, anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) on the rise, the political system seems to have lost its welcoming attitude toward immigrants. Instead, UKIP officials have lured the Conservatives and more recently even the left-of-center Labour party into a race to the bottom, in which the prime minister even publicly considered limiting the freedom of movement for EU citizens. Time will tell if this development amounts to more than the typical pre-election hysteria. A report by The Commons Public Account Committee (PAC) and regular critiques by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration revealed serious and persistent shortcomings in the UK’s immigration and asylum bureaucracy after a general restructuring in 2013, and after the recent failure of two major IT projects intended to improve the Home Office’s work.

Safe Living

Safe Living
Conditions
Score: 8

Objectively speaking, citizens of the United Kingdom have enjoyed improved security over the last 15 years as the crime rate has dropped significantly and consistently (although it continues to be relatively high in absolute terms when compared to other OECD countries).

This is not reflected, however, in increased subjective perception of security, since British citizens (probably influenced by media reporting) perceive crime to be on the rise. The issue thus remains in the public spotlight, and cuts in the budgets of the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice – in line with overall budget cuts to fight the deficit – have therefore been politically contentious. The most recent figures do, nevertheless, suggest a further fall in crime,

although questions have been raised about whether “new” crimes like cybercrime are being adequately recorded. Moreover, even in higher crime areas, there are few signs that citizens consider the environment to be unsafe.

The coalition government abolished some of the harsh counter-terrorism laws introduced by earlier Labour governments in an attempt to correct the balance in favor of civil rights. A new National Crime Agency started work in the autumn of 2013 as a central body for crime fighting. Certain high-profile revelations of police malpractice, including the recently exposed falsification of records in the Hillsborough football disaster of 1989, have led to disquiet about police behavior, but have not conspicuously undermined confidence.

There is continuing concern about terrorist threats, accentuated by the renewed difficulties in the Middle East as well as specific incidents (such as the brutal murder of a young soldier in May 2013) and revelations of planned attacks.

Global Inequalities

Global Social
Policy
Score: 9

The coalition government, unlike earlier Conservative-led governments, is strongly committed to development aid. The government sees this as linking humanitarian efforts to its anti-terrorism agenda. As a consequence, the government has maintained the high levels of spending introduced by the previous Labour government, and it has even ring-fenced the development aid budget in its spending cuts – a move which met substantial opposition in public opinion. Both measured against United Nations’ targets and against international reality, the United Kingdom’s public aid spending must be considered generous. The country has continued to champion the development agenda at G8 and G20 meetings.

Development assistance spending is coordinated by the Department for International Development, whose work is scrutinized by the newly created Independent Commission for Aid Impact.

In general, the United Kingdom is a proponent of open markets and fair access for developing countries, although an attempt in the late 1990s to espouse an ethical-trade policy was subsequently quietly dropped.

III. Environmental Policies

Environment

Environmental
Policy
Score: 8

Environmental policy is close to the heart of both partners in the coalition government, and the government promised a wide range of action to protect and preserve the sustainability of natural resources and the quality of the environment. It set itself the goal of becoming “the greenest government ever.” However, worries about the cost of living led the government to suspend automatic increases in fuel duties, and there have been rumblings of discontent over the 2008 Climate Change Act, which forms the legislative foundation for climate-change policies.

In many areas, the new government could build on the previous government’s initiatives – for example, in introducing market-based mechanisms to environmental policy – but also on a planning system that had endeavored to preserve and protect “green belts” around major conurbations. Plans by the Labour government to build “eco towns” as new models for sustainable living (with low carbon emissions, renewable energy, expansive green space, high recycling rates etc.), however, were scaled back substantially in spending cuts.

Much environmental policy is determined by the European Union (e.g., the Water Framework Directive or the Biodiversity Agenda) beyond which there is little space for nationally specific initiatives.

Global Environmental Protection

Global
Environmental
Policy
Score: 7

In past decades, the United Kingdom has resisted plans to extend environmental protection regimes at European level. This resulted from its industrial interests, the country’s strong reliance on fossil fuels, and a geographic location that largely insulated it from the adverse effects of toxic emissions and acid rain. In the 1990s, beginning with the Major government, there was a policy shift, and the United Kingdom became one of the foremost nations pushing for environmental protection standards in the European Union. The country ratified the Kyoto Protocol, but it was skeptical about the promotion of any global environmental protection regimes, even if they were consistent with nationally pursued policies.

The present Conservative/Liberal Democrat government continues to verbally support climate protection policies. Prime Minister Cameron undertook a

much-publicized trip to the Arctic Circle to signal his concern about global warming, and has continued the broadly supportive approach to EU energy initiated by the Labour government. Nationally, it has continued to pursue the Labour government's targets for cutting carbon emissions by a third by 2020, and agreed to the more demanding targets set by the European Council in October 2014. Despite occasional voices of dissent, there has been no real move to renege on international commitments.

Quality of Democracy

Electoral Processes

Candidacy
Procedures
Score: 9

In the United Kingdom, procedures for registering candidates and parties can generally be considered fair and without regulatory discrimination. The process of registration is uncomplicated, and the information required is offered by the state and easily accessible. No restrictions or regulations exist on party programs, but there are regulations limiting the choice of party name, which must not be obscene, offensive or misleading. The party emblem should also avoid these qualities. Registration as a candidate requires a deposit of £500 and the support of at least 10 voters. Support from a party is not necessary, as candidates can run as independents, and many candidates do take advantage of this provision. Very occasionally, a candidate standing on a single issue achieves election, even in national elections.

Members of certain groups are not allowed to stand for election – namely those in the police, the armed forces, civil servants, judges, and hereditary members of the House of Lords who retain a seat there. While this may be considered reasonably necessary in a democracy (although no such restrictions are in place in many similar democracies), it seems harder to justify the exclusion of people who have undergone bankruptcy or debt relief restriction orders because this is tantamount to a second punishment for financial mismanagement and thus discriminating against them.

Media Access
Score: 7

The media plays a central role in political campaigning, and the importance of coverage has further increased in recent years through the rise of social media and the Internet. Television remains the most important medium for campaigning in general elections. Paid TV advertising is prohibited for political parties, who can only advertise in newspapers. However, major parties are granted a certain amount of free time for TV advertising, a concession that is not available to minor parties and which could be construed as a deterrent to them. Coverage on television is fair and balanced, and policed by Ofcom, the industry regulator. Broadcasters are required to be balanced in their coverage of parties, especially at election time. No such restrictions exist for the print industry, and indeed there is strong tradition of partiality, especially by some newspaper groups that are prominent in national political life.

Voting and
Registrations
Rights
Score: 9

In UK general elections, British, Irish and qualifying citizens of Commonwealth countries can vote. Entitlement to vote thus extends beyond British citizenship. However, the aforementioned nationalities can vote only if they have leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

In order to be entitled to vote, voters must be on the electoral register which is kept by local authorities and updated yearly. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 has also introduced individual electoral registration which is intended to improve the security of the registration process. Registration statistics show strong regional and social discrepancies.

A restriction on the right to vote in national elections applies only in three cases, namely criminal imprisonment, mental disability, and membership either of the House of Lords or the royal family.

Party Financing
Score: 6

The Electoral Commission oversees all political financing in the United Kingdom. The commission is an independent institution set up by Parliament, which publishes all its findings online to make them easily accessible. Although all donations above a certain threshold must be reported to the commission, the fact that political parties are largely dependent on donations for their ever-increasing spending on national campaigns has repeatedly led to scandals such as the “cash for access scandal” in 2010 when access to the prime minister was sold for a party donation. There have also been highly publicized cases where individual donors have been rewarded by being granted honors, and changes have been made in the rules to prevent donations from individuals not resident in the United Kingdom. Although these cases have generated considerable media interest, there is not much evidence that donations have influenced policy.

In 2011, the Committee on Standards in Public Life published a report recommending a cap of £10,000 on donations from individuals or organizations.

Contributions from party members or local associations (through local fundraising) are relatively minor – though still useful to parties – compared to the amount parties receive from institutional sponsors (trade unions in the case of the Labour Party, business associations in the case of the Conservative Party) and individual donors. There is also some state financing of parties (known as “Short Money” after the politician who initiated it in the 1970s). The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government is committed to reforming party financing, but there has been no substantial progress on this issue.

Popular Decision-
Making
Score: 3

While the instrument of referendum has seen much public debate in recent years (especially over the issues of Scottish independence and European integration, but also on electoral reform), the legal foundations for calling a

referendum and binding the government to its outcome must be considered weak. At the national level a referendum can only be initiated by the government, and its result is not legally binding, although it will usually exert strong political pressure. As a tool for citizens to impose their will on the government of the day, let alone in perpetuity, the referendum situation in the United Kingdom must be considered very weak.

A recent example is the resounding vote against changing the voting system for House of Commons elections, which effectively killed the idea for the foreseeable future. But the referendum on Scottish independence – with very high voter-turnout rates (85%, compared with just 65% at the last general election, and derisory turnouts in the European Parliament and local-election votes six months before the Scottish referendum) and an unexpectedly close outcome – has by contrast been seen as energizing for democracy. It also shook up politics at Westminster. Although too early to tell for certain, the Scottish referendum may turn out to have been the most influential such polling exercise in modern British history, even though it failed at the ballots.

Access to Information

Media Freedom
Score: 6

In the United Kingdom, television channels both in the public and the private sector are required by law to be politically neutral. The sector is overseen by the Ofcom regulator. No such requirement exists for print media. The BBC, the country's only public service broadcaster, is financed by a television license which is effectively a poll tax. It is overseen by a board of governors and enjoys almost complete political independence. However, recent scandals may have weakened the BBC's standing, although there is as yet little evidence of that in its behavior, and it remains the case that TV and radio journalists often subject government and opposition politicians to very tough interviews. Politicians of all persuasions frequently accuse the BBC of bias – arguably highlighting the fact that it is outside political control. A number of events and scandals in recent years have made clear the overly strong bonds between the political establishment and Westminster lobby journalists, a relationship which may or may not have had negative effects on the quality of reporting. The aftermath of the News of the World scandal in 2011 (i.e., the Leveson Inquiry, which published its report and recommendations in spring 2013) demonstrated the existence of overly close relations between politicians and the press. There has also been a lively debate as to whether curbs on the press should be adopted to prevent excessively intrusive journalism. The outcome of this discussion is still not certain, although it is noteworthy that the imperative of press freedom has been reasserted by many political leaders.

During the global surveillance disclosures in 2013, the government put strong

pressure on The Guardian to stop the newspaper from publishing further classified information. This included conventional legal steps, but also entailed the short detention of a journalist's partner, who was accused of carrying classified documents. At the peak of the government's campaign, at the instruction of the cabinet secretary, intelligence officers held editors in The Guardian's office basement and forced them to destroy their own hard drives with drills and grinding machines. Although these drastic and dramatic measures were not effective in preventing The Guardian from publishing its findings, they cast a poor light on the UK government's appreciation of media freedom – all the more since it was always clear that digital duplicates of the data existed outside the United Kingdom, and publication could thus not be stopped by the destruction of specific computer equipment. The episode is another manifestation of the tension between concerns about security and the preservation of liberties.

Media Pluralism
Score: 7

The strong concentration of newspaper ownership has long been a feature of the United Kingdom's media market, and that continues to be the case. The BBC as a public-service broadcaster has a dominant position, especially with regard to broadcast and online news. Powerful individual owners such as Rupert Murdoch (News Corporation) have a long tradition in the country's history, dating back to the 19th century. This coexists with a lively regional newspaper scene which has, however, little influence in terms of national opinion.

The electronic media and television market, in contrast, is much more balanced and also required by regulation to be politically neutral.

The support of the Murdoch media empire has been considered politically crucial over the last two decades. The firm has been very influential particularly in terms of the country's position towards European integration. Following the News of the World scandal and the enquiry into corporate standards at News Corporation, Murdoch's influence may have been weakened, but that of the Daily Mail Group remains strong. In addition, the Leveson Inquiry has demanded higher diversity in ownership and tighter regulation on media mergers, both of which (if enacted) could also work towards more diversity of opinion. The press, collectively, has strongly opposed attempts to circumscribe the freedom of opinion, and the matter remains unresolved.

Access to
Government
Information
Score: 8

The United Kingdom has a long tradition of official secrecy. However, in recent years successive governments have very actively tried to capitalize on the transparency and cost-savings potential of making government information available online. Together with the Freedom of Information Act 2005, this has contributed to easier access for citizens and, often in a very high-profile way, the media. The United Kingdom has also been at the forefront of making

government data available for commercial use and citizen inspection (“open data”). The restrictions on what information can be provided under the Freedom of Information Act (cost limits; national security restrictions; state financial interests) are largely in line with the respective regulations in other countries. Recent efforts to simplify and render government information more accessible have seen the replacement of a profusion of web sites with a single government portal – www.gov.uk – and it is clear that the government now regards the provision of information as a high priority.

Civil Rights and Political Liberties

Civil Rights
Score: 6

In the United Kingdom, civil liberties have long been protected despite the absence of a written constitution and an accompanying bill of rights. The country thus shows that effective protection is possible if support for civil rights is firmly rooted in society and therefore is expected of the government of the day. However, UK citizens have been afforded additional rights of protection from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Events of the last decade such as terrorist attacks have also demonstrated that the balance between state interests and individual rights can be more easily tilted if there are no institutional protections at hand. Various anti-terrorism acts (2000; 2001; 2005; 2006; 2008) have given the British state more and harsher instruments to fight terrorism. For most citizens, these anti-terrorist measures are not an issue, but for the very small minority that they affect, they can be a source of dismay. Governments have also objected to rulings from the ECHR, to the extent that some ministers have advocated a UK withdrawal from the court.

While courts and public pressure have from time to time succeeded in stopping practices like the indefinite detention of non-nationals, the state has usually succeeded in reintroducing them after some time under a different name, for example when replacing “control orders” with “terrorism prevention and investigation measures.” However, it does so under quite intense media scrutiny. The files leaked by former NSA subcontractor and system administrator Edward Snowden disclosed a degree of digital surveillance in the United Kingdom that far exceeded expectations. The Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), with its Tempora and publicly less-well-noted MUSCULAR programs, as well as the NSA/GCHQ PRISM joint venture, tracks and evaluates a very large share of national and international electronic communications. But despite the initial media outcry, public opposition to these programs has been relatively mild. Furthermore, British society is well aware of the proactive tradition of its national intelligence services, and criticism tends to be limited outside the context of libertarian

pressure groups. The most sustained opposition today comes from communication firms whose servers were hacked by government agents to access private data. Despite public indifference, however, the GCHQ's operations in the United Kingdom, like those of other security agencies in countries also affected by these secret programs, can be seen as infringements of civil rights.

Political Liberties
Score: 8

Without a written constitution and the protection it affords, citizens of the United Kingdom have no fundamental rights in the sense of enjoying special protection against the powers of the executive and Parliament. Citizens' rights in the United Kingdom can thus be said to be residual and negative in nature: citizens can do anything not expressly prohibited by law, but there are no positive rights to assert against the government unless the government concedes them. In practice, UK citizens enjoy considerable freedoms, although the police have recently acquired powers to constrain protests. Even so, demonstrations do take place.

Since disputes about political liberties always arise over contested issues, this means that UK citizens have little recourse within the political system, especially when compared to continental European political systems. The Human Rights Act of 1998 (HRA) represented an attempt to create a "higher law" to which all other laws must conform. It offers individual and minority rights, and empowers judges to hold the executive to account and review acts of Parliament. But its effectiveness is constrained by the fact that the government can temporarily annul the HRA if it considers this necessary for the benefit of the country, and it remains contested, especially in the context of the United Kingdom's continued commitment to European integration. Though political messages considering or calling for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Court of Human Rights (sometimes wrongly conflated with antagonism to "Europe") do not really reflect illiberal sentiments, they could nevertheless be interpreted as such.

Non-discrimination
Score: 8

Over the last 15 years, measures to combat discrimination have entered the political agenda and the statute books. Starting with the Race Relations Act 2000, all public authorities have been obliged to promote race equality and tackle discrimination. In 2006, this was extended to cover gender and disability discrimination as well. The Equality Act 2010 has added further areas, such as age, gender identity, pregnancy and maternity, and religion or belief to that list. Political pressure is being exerted to extend that list further by adding "caste" in order to fight discrimination still common in the Asian community. The legal framework is therefore very robust in countering discrimination and has had a significant impact on social attitudes, with the

result that incidents of discrimination are rapidly and loudly condemned.

But while the state has made a serious attempt to end discrimination and abolish inequalities by reacting to a number of scandals in, for example, the police force with its alleged “institutionalized racism,” negative attitudes towards minorities still surface occasionally. Relatively minor incidents on the football field become headline news and the mainstream view is very strongly anti-discriminatory, to the extent that even populist political parties appealing to indigenous groups have to be very careful to avoid any hint of overt racism or other forms of discrimination. Economic difficulties and rising unemployment have contributed to concerns about the impact of immigration, on which right-wing political forces and the right-wing press try to capitalize. In the aftermath of the 2011 London riots, racial and social prejudices became more visibly prevalent. There is still a massive imbalance in the national DNA database (40% of the black male population is registered, but only 13% of Asian males and 9% of Caucasian males), and anti-terrorism laws sometimes entail racial profiling, but these phenomena are motivated primarily by security concerns, not explicit discrimination.

Rule of Law

Legal Certainty
Score: 9

In the United Kingdom, government and administration act predictably and in line with legal provisions. This is facilitated by the fact that the government has a large degree of control over the legislative process and therefore finds it easy to alter provisions if they constitute a hindrance to government policy objectives. Media and other checks on executive action deter any deviation.

Judicial Review
Score: 8

The United Kingdom has no written constitution and no constitutional court and therefore no judicial review which is comparable to that in the United States or many European countries. While courts have no power to declare parliamentary legislation unconstitutional, they scrutinize executive action to prevent public authorities from acting beyond their powers. The United Kingdom has a sophisticated and well-developed legal system which is highly regarded internationally and based on the regulated appointment of judges. Judicial oversight is in addition provided by the European Court of Human Rights, to which UK citizens have recourse. However, as a consequence of several recent high-profile ECHR decisions overturning government policies, some political figures have raised the possibility of withdrawing the United Kingdom from the court’s jurisdiction.

In recent years, courts have strengthened their position in the political system; in cases of public concern over government action, public inquiries have often been held. However, implementation of any resulting recommendations is ultimately up to government, as the public lacks legal or judicial power. Many

such inquiries tend to be ad hoc, and some (the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war, for example) drag on for so long that the public has all but forgotten their subject by the time their final reports are made.

In this regard, judge-led inquiries are seen by the public as having the highest degree of legitimacy, whereas investigations by members of the bureaucracy are prone to be regarded more cynically.

Appointment of
Justices
Score: 7

The judicial appointments system reflects the informality of the constitution, but it has undergone substantial changes in recent years, which formalize a cooperative process without a majority requirement. Since the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the powers of the lord chancellor have been divided up, and the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom has been established. The latter replaces the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords and relieves the second chamber of its judiciary role. The 12 judges are appointed by the queen upon recommendation by the prime minister who in turn acts on advice from the lord chancellor in cooperation with the selection commission. It would, nevertheless, be a surprise if the prime minister over-rode the recommendations. The queen's role is purely formal rubber-stamping and she is bound to impartiality, whereas the lord chancellor has a highly influential role in consultation with the legal profession.

There is no empirical basis on which to assess the actual independence of appointments, but there is every reason to believe that the appointment process will confirm the independence of the judiciary.

Corruption
Prevention
Score: 7

The United Kingdom is comparatively free of explicit corruption like bribery or fraud, and there is little evidence that explicit corruption influences decision-making at national level. Occasional episodes arise of limited and small-scale corruption at local level, usually around property development. The delinquents of recent scandals in UK politics mostly acted within the law; however, these scandals point to a continuing gap between politicians' attitudes and the public's expectations. Regulations against corruption have already been formalized to strengthen them, with the 2004 Corruption Bill consolidating and updating regulations into one law. On most international comparisons, the UK comes out with strong scores.

The MPs' expenses scandal of 2009 has provoked a call for more transparency in this field, but is an example of an informal "British" approach to the political problem of not wanting to raise MPs' salaries. Instead, there was a tacit understanding that they could claim generous expenses. The rules were tightened very substantially in the wake of the scandal. It has become evident that traditional values and ethics are no longer sufficient and that positive regulation is required. The News of the World scandal as well as the

resignation of Defense Secretary Liam Fox have been recent indications of the necessity of further action in this field. Codes of practice are being revised, and the “independent adviser on ministers’ interests” has recommended a new and independent office to control public officeholders’ possible conflicts of interest.

At a more subtle level, influence based on connections and friendships can occur, but rarely with direct financial implications. However, some regulatory decisions may be affected by the exercise of such influence.

Governance

I. Executive Capacity

Strategic Capacity

Strategic
Planning
Score: 8

Although the United Kingdom has one of the most centralized political systems and long-established liberal democracies in the world, the resources directly available to the prime minister are not very developed. Contrary to many comparable countries and their core executives, there is no prime ministerial department to provide strategic planning or advice. However, the Cabinet Office provides an important coordinating role across government and its head, the cabinet secretary, attends cabinet meetings. The role previously also included heading the civil service, but the job was split early in the current government, enabling the cabinet secretary to concentrate more on strategy. A substantial effort has been made since 2010 to modernize the civil service, with a cabinet-level minister taking the lead, resulting in a civil-service reform plan launched in 2012. Establishing policymaking as a profession is one of the stated goals, a task that will have potentially long-term consequences for steering capability and strategic capacity.

The Number 10 Policy Unit, which has existed under various names since the mid-1970s, was dissolved by the coalition government in an attempt to signal a change from the New Labour governments. Previously, this body had been staffed by a large number of special advisers whose much-debated authority to issue orders to civil servants had been politically contentious. In 2012, the prime minister (PM) and deputy prime minister (DPM) established a dedicated Implementation Unit (IU) within the Cabinet Office, charged with driving implementation in areas deemed by the two top ministers to be of high priority. The IU's function is both to challenge and support line ministries, while providing evidence-based advice to the PM and DPM. It also oversees departmental business plans. One consequence of the coalition government is that the prime minister has had to consult with the deputy prime minister, and the need for compromise has thus required close contact between the two parties.

Citation:

https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/twelve_actions_report_web_accessible.pdf

Institute for Government (2014) Whitehall Monitor 2014 A data-driven analysis of the size, shape and performance of Whitehall

<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IFG%20Whitehall%20Monitor%202014.pdf>

Scholarly
Advice
Score: 8

Non-governmental academic experts played an important role in conducting independent reviews of central government policy or strategy during the post-1997 Labour governments. They have worked on the economics of climate change (Sir Nicholas Stern), the future of the pension system (Lord Turner), a review of health trends (Sir Derek Wanless) and fuel poverty (Sir John Hills). Established academics have also served in decision-making bodies such as the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England over the last 15 years and thus been given substantial influence over core decisions. Most government departments solicit external studies on policy-relevant issues. These reports are subject to normal procurement rules, typically with a restricted call for tenders.

When the coalition government took power, the change altered the political orientation of the experts consulted. However, a further shift in practice was due to the commitment to what is known as open policymaking (OPM), under which policymakers are called on to actively seek broader inputs into the policy process. The traditionally strong influence of think tanks has continued, but those of the left-leaning variety (Institute for Public Policy Research, Policy Network etc.) have been replaced by more conservative-minded ones (Bow Group, Centre for Policy Studies, etc.). All these interactions are transparent, but they occur at various stages of the policy process and are often initiated by the think tanks themselves. What appears to have changed is the underlying approach to OPM, with a stronger emphasis on not just using the evidence base, but also on identifying new and better policy concepts and solutions.

There are also many informal channels through which government consults or is briefed by individual academics who have expertise in specific areas. These channels are often more influential than more formal consultation processes. One recent example was the review of the balance of competences between the EU and the national level, in which several government departments made very extensive attempts to engage with academics. It is also routine for civil servants to be involved in academic events.

Interministerial Coordination

GO Expertise
Score: 9

The Policy and Implementation Unit (PIU) in the Prime Minister's Office continues to be a potent tool for the evaluation of ministerial draft bills, but the primary coordinating role is undertaken by the Cabinet Office which has expertise in all areas of government. According to its website, it has over 2,000 staff and has

responsibility for the National Security Council as well as the primary role in “making government work better.” The staff of the PIU are policy experts from the civil service with good networks into the ministries and excellent substantive expertise, and it is common for civil servants working in the Cabinet Office to have worked in other government departments. The role of the Treasury in putting pressure on spending departments also contributes to inter-ministerial coordination.

Politically, the creation of a coalition government has increased the need for coordination, as Deputy Prime Minister Clegg maintains his office in the Cabinet Office. The reorganization of the Number 10 Policy Unit temporarily weakened evaluation capacity, but that has been restored with an increase in staff numbers and the creation of the above-mentioned PIU.

GO
Gatekeeping
Score: 7

The creation of a coalition government and the need for bipartisan approval has somewhat changed the role of the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister’s Office because policies have to be consistent with the coalition agreement. There is an informal cabinet committee comprising of two cabinet ministers from each of the coalition partners – with the cabinet secretary in attendance – which assesses policy proposals. The coalition has decentralized power, and the “no surprises” rule leaves little scope for discretion. Cabinet Committee papers have to circulate for 10 days to ensure collective approval, and the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office provides alternative ways to launch items. Nevertheless the power structures in the British system mean that the prime minister is still in a position to question most policy materials. There was no significant change during the period under consideration (2013 – 2014).

Citation:

Constitution Unit 2011: Inside Story: How Coalition Government Works (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/coalition-government/interim-report.pdf>).

Royal Holloway Group 2012: A partnership of unequals: Positional power in the coalition government, in: *British Politics* 7 (4), 418-442.

Line Ministries
Score: 9

The coalition government has created a system of regular informal meetings to take account of the increased requirement for coordination, but the Cabinet Office remains a powerful force in the preparation of policy proposals. There are regular meetings of the chief advisers to Cameron and Clegg whose goal it is to enforce the policy cohesion of the coalition. In terms of its potential to undermine or disturb the prime minister’s agenda, the Treasury is the most important ministry, as was evident during the Blair governments when Gordon Brown was chancellor of the exchequer. However, the Cameron/Osborne partnership has been strong since the beginning of the coalition government and central to its success on the Conservative side, and therefore no rival tendencies have impaired the coordination of policy proposals from that side.

Cabinet
Committees
Score: 9

The importance of cabinet meetings and committees diminished under the Blair governments, with an increase in so-called sofa government in which the prime minister and the chancellor tried to resolve their many political differences. The coalition has instead seen a revival of the importance both of full cabinet meetings and of committee work. Committee membership, which in the past was used by prime ministers to determine results in advance, is now carefully calibrated to ensure fair representation of both coalition parties, and there is a powerful coalition committee, chaired jointly by the prime minister and deputy prime minister. One recent innovation is the creation of the National Security Council. Cabinet committees now serve as a forum for policy debate and decision, but are also the place where the resolution of interdepartmental conflicts takes place. An informal Coalition Operation and Strategic Planning Group with two relatively low-profile ministers from each party plays an important political role in resolving coalition tensions. Overall political direction is provided by “the quad,” comprising the prime minister, the deputy prime minister and two cabinet colleagues, for a total of two figures from each of the two coalition parties.

Ministerial
Bureaucracy
Score: 8

The inter-ministerial coordination of policy proposals is officially a goal in the Whitehall policy machine. However, problems of capacity and capability in this area have been revealed by surveys undertaken within the civil service. Two developments have contributed to disruptions in this area: on the one hand, the Civil Service Reform Plan of 2012; on the other hand, the coalition’s spending cuts, which have hit parts of the ministerial bureaucracy very hard (30% of senior civil-servant jobs have been abolished). Relations between Whitehall and the government have been affected, but the situation does not seem to have had a great impact on the efficiency of policy-proposal coordination. As explained above, the Cabinet Office assures coordination at the level of officials.

Informal
Coordination
Score: 9

The informal coordination which was a hallmark of the Blair governments was reduced under Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Under the coalition government, the political necessity of coordinating different political forces and parties led to the creation of additional cabinet committees, as well as the more informal “quad” of top ministers as a means of resolving tensions. Whether these are informal or simply a pragmatic adaptation of the established form of governance is a question of semantics. Given the propensity of the UK electoral system to result in single-party governments, there is likely to be a reversion to the status quo ante after the next general election. However, as of the time of writing, polling did not suggest that any party was on course for a clear parliamentary majority.

Evidence-based Instruments

RIA
Application
Score: 9

The reduction of regulation costs has been a long-standing policy goal pursued by Labour governments – the aim was to reduce the cost of regulation to businesses in Britain by 25% by 2010. The new coalition government is following in these tracks, and any new regulatory proposal must be submitted to the Reducing Regulation

Committee, a cabinet subcommittee tasked with scrutinizing, challenging and approving all new regulatory proposals. Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) have to be prepared for all legislation which affects businesses, charities or voluntary bodies in order to assess the benefits and burdens of the planned measure. Academic research has questioned the impact of these assessments as their results are not systematically integrated into the decision-making process, but they are certainly applied.

Citation:

Dunlop, Claire A. et al. 2012: The many uses of regulatory impact assessment: A meta- analysis of EU and UK cases, in: Regulation & Governance Vol. 6 23-45.

Quality of RIA
Process
Score: 8

The RIA process is transparent – guidance on how to do it is accessible online. There is also a quality evaluation – all impact assessments are scrutinized by the Regulatory Policy Committee (RPC) which provides feedback for the Reducing Regulation Committee on the quality of the analysis and evidence presented. Deficits can be seen with respect to participation, however. While the RPC is always keen to hear the views of stakeholders on the impacts of new proposed regulation, there is no formal mechanism for their involvement, and evidence submitted by them is considered but not discussed. On the other hand, the government invites direct comment on the process so that it can be considered to make an effort to engage citizens and – perhaps most importantly – businesses. There is a one-in-two-out principle for new regulations, with information regularly updated online.

Sustainability
Check
Score: 10

In the United Kingdom, the whole process of RIA aims to provide support for sustainable policy-making. The assessment is based on a large scale of different indicators including social, environmental and ecological and other factors; economic impact, however, seems to be the most important. The assessments analyze the impact of regulation over several time periods (i.e., over the short, medium and long term) and they take account of unpredictable external shocks and unforeseeable developments.

Societal Consultation

Negotiating
Public Support
Score: 6

There is little tradition in the system of British government – either on the executive side or in the process of legislation – of systematically incorporating organized civil society into the decision-making process. There was a period that ended in the late 1970s in which unions and employers were central to decision-making, but since then the role of these actors has been much diminished. However, it is not negligible and it is routine for public consultations to seek a wide range of views. Since 2010, a significant effort has been made to make government more open, leading to a substantial increase in the transparency of policymaking. This has included systematic efforts to consult a range of actors, though the relatively limited engagement of social partners in the policy process contrasts with the much more formal position they enjoy in many other western European countries. Impact

assessments are one means by which consultation has been enhanced, with drafts circulated to stakeholders before being finalized, and feedback affecting decisions on whether or not to proceed with the policy change under review.

Given the pluralist nature of the British system of interest groups and associations, it can be difficult to identify which organization would be competent and legitimized to speak on a certain issue. The current prime minister, David Cameron, introduced the idea of the “Big Society” in the 2010 election campaign and pledged to transfer power from the central to the local government level, while encouraging people to volunteer for social work and support civil cooperation. This agenda has had some success, with a 2011 act of parliament reinforcing local governments’ rights to engage in independent initiatives. A number of examples demonstrate how consultation has been used to formulate policy at an operational level. For example, stakeholder input has been influential in shaping spending decisions within the UK’s AMPLIFY program, which seeks to ensure the safety of women in disadvantaged communities. Moreover, consultation has been critical in selecting projects for the “Northern Futures” initiative, which seeks to foster economic development within the urban belt in the North of England.

Citation:

<https://openideo.com/content/about-amplify>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/northern-futures-summit>

Policy Communication

Coherent
Communication
n
Score: 8

Compared with the secrecy culture of earlier decades, government has become much more open in the United Kingdom, through a combination of the Freedom of Information Act passed by the Blair government and a willingness to use the internet to explain policy. The government in power during the period under review sought to distance itself from its predecessor’s approach, in which “spin” was a prominently used tool, and Prime Minister Cameron also tried to avoid the appearance of centrally dictated government communication. This change of strategy made progress during the period. The recently renamed www.gov.uk website provides extensive information on government services and activities and has been redesigned to be more user friendly. The site is part of the Open Policy Making (OPM) initiative, which also includes a blog and novel approaches such as a “policy lab” that was launched in 2014. These are recent innovations that cannot yet be fairly appraised, but appear to represent a new means of enhancing communication.

An additional challenge for the government has been to communicate a common sense of purpose while retaining the distinct positions of the two parties forming the coalition. To some extent, the coalition partners have made public some of the internal policy disagreements, but it has been unclear whether this betrays a lack of

coherence or simply a political desire to maintain their separate identities. Since the British public's expectation is that the government presents a unified position, going "off message" is still an easy way for politicians to put themselves into the spotlight; however, ministers tend to use off-the-record briefings. The government has occasionally suffered from this dissent with respect to the issue of European integration, but has so far managed to contain the damage.

Citation:

<https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/> is an open site with short articles on the OPM approach

Implementation

Government
Efficiency
Score: 9

The United Kingdom's political system is highly centralized; there are no "veto players" outside the central government who could challenge or undermine its core policy objectives. There is no written constitution and no constitutional court able to challenge government decisions directly and effectively. However, there is provision for judicial review, something the government is currently trying to limit because it has been used much more extensively in recent years. The devolution of certain powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has meant that some national policy goals are subject to decisions at the sub-national level over which the central government has only limited powers. The consequences of the Scottish referendum vote are likely to raise new complications in this regard.

In the past, problems in achieving policy objectives have mainly arisen through intra-party disunity and parliamentary party rebellions. The historically new challenge for the Cameron government has been to enable a coalition government to cooperate smoothly, and through a variety of formal and informal mechanisms this has so far been quite successful. Coalition frictions have resulted in certain plans being disrupted, notably around various constitutional reforms. The issue of European integration has also been problematic, with pressures inside the Conservative party forcing the prime minister to announce an in/out EU referendum after the next general election, and recent demands for it to take place even sooner. To what extent this will ultimately force the prime minister to change course remains to be seen.

Ministerial
Compliance
Score: 9

The British prime minister has traditionally had more or less absolute power to appoint politicians to government positions. He can thus count on his power of patronage to earn him the loyalty of his backbenchers and to ensure that ministers stick to the government agenda. Despite occasional leaking of dissent, the collective responsibility of cabinet is a well-entrenched doctrine. The prime minister's power is partly dependent on the incumbent's political strength and calculations by their party as to their future electoral success (which is directly linked to their own job security). Party whips also play a key role in passing legislation and thus in supporting the government, and although the Conservative MPs of the "class of

2010” are sometimes considered to be more prone to rebellion, any with strong political ambitions have to be wary of being branded as mavericks.

In the coalition government, Prime Minister Cameron’s power is somewhat circumscribed by having to consult with the deputy prime minister over appointments and dismissals. Deputy Prime Minister Clegg therefore has a de facto veto over changes in government, but as long as the bilateral relationship between the prime minister and deputy prime minister is good and is seen to be good, this does not substantively reduce the prime minister’s power. Cabinet reshuffles like that of 2012 demonstrate the maneuverability of the prime minister in that respect, and the incentives for cabinet ministers to work towards the implementation of the government’s program are accordingly high.

Monitoring
Ministries
Score: 9

The tight integration between the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet Office enables British prime ministers to be effective in determining the strategic direction of the government. The Treasury has long had an important monitoring role that goes beyond the role of finance ministries in other countries. Decision-making is concentrated in strategic units and in informal meetings, and ministers have to reveal their preferences in cabinet meetings, cabinet committees and bilateral meetings with the prime minister, chancellor or deputy prime minister, so monitoring is relatively easy for the core executive. The somewhat more autonomous status of the Liberal Democrat ministers is balanced by their additional supervision through the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office. In addition, ministers from the two participating parties monitor their coalition partners quite closely for compliance with the joint program.

Monitoring
Agencies,
Bureaucracies
Score: 7

Central state ministries have no formal oversight power with regard to ministries in areas where devolution has granted powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But the United Kingdom has been an early adopter of delegating civil-service work to executive agencies in order to improve performance and reduce costs, which has been going on since the early 1990s under the Next Steps Programme. There is, moreover, an expectation that the departmental minister takes responsibility for agencies which the ministry oversees, although there is no longer an expectation that the minister will have to resign if problems arise in an agency. Hence this delegation has also been found to disconnect civil servants from some of the activities notionally assigned to their ministries while reducing the ministerial accountability of the public service. More recently a “re-aggregation” to re-establish ministries’ lines of control has been taking place. The current Civil Service Reform also seeks to introduce new instruments of performance control and individual accountability.

Nevertheless, repeated problems have been apparent in significant agencies such as the UK Border Agency, which is responsible for overseeing the entry and management of foreign nationals. The fact that it was a monitoring agency (a chief inspector) that exposed some of these problems could be interpreted as an indication that good monitoring was taking place; however, the scale of the problems suggests otherwise, and the agency was recently taken back under direct political control. A

number of child-abuse scandals and the recent case of the alleged takeover of schools in Birmingham by “Islamists” revealed problems with regard to monitoring local-level entities, including local child care, youth offices and police services. The scale and in some instances the duration of these cases casts doubt on the general effectiveness of the monitoring of local bureaucracies.

Citation:

Elston, Thomas 2011: Developments in UK executive agencies: re-examining the disaggregation – re-aggregation thesis, Paper presented to the Governance of Public Sector Organisations study group at the 33 rd Annual Conference of the European Group for Public Administration, Bucharest, 7th – 10th September 2011.

Task Funding
Score: 7

Three of the four countries of the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have devolved governments and responsibility for major areas of public services, such as health and education. England, by far the largest part of the United Kingdom, has no government of its own, but local authorities in England have responsibility for a more limited range of public services including schools.

The central government exercises tight control over the finances of the three national governments and of local authorities in England, the bulk of whose income comes from grants from central government. Domestic property taxes are the principal revenue instrument available to sub-national governments, but even the level of these is substantially controlled by central government. Given the absence of a written constitution, there is no mechanism to govern the allocation of funds to finance these devolved tasks, and decisions about them are therefore subject to political and administrative negotiations through formula-based need assessments. Agreements such as the “Barnett Formula” for Scotland, Wales and England provide some stability of funding. However, despite their recent reaffirmation, these could change if fiscal consolidation requires severe spending cuts under the next government.

The Scotland Act 2012 gave the Scottish Administration new taxation and borrowing powers, but further extensive change is now likely as a result of the 2014 Scottish Referendum, with a consensus behind following the Smith Commission recommendation to devolve power over income tax and certain other revenue streams. The Welsh Assembly has far less fiscal discretion, but the central government has agreed that borrowing powers should also be devolved to the Welsh government. A new settlement for Northern Ireland is also under discussion, but agreement had not been reached at the time of writing. At some stage, a debate on financial matters in England must also be expected.

Citation:

Scully, Roger/Jones Richard Wyn 2011: 7. Territorial politics in post-Devolution Britain, in: Heffernan, Richard et al.: Developments in British Politics 9, Basingstoke and New York

http://www.smith-commission.scot/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Smith_Commission_Report-1.pdf

Constitutional
Discretion
Score: 5

A distinction must be made between local government and the devolved Scottish Parliament, and Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies. Local governments in England largely do little more than act as regional executors for Westminster policies and they have limited “constitutional scope,” although recent reforms included in the 2011 Localism Act were intended to give them more discretion in the use of the funds allocated to them and in a variety of regulatory tasks. However, they have no way to challenge or oppose central-government actions. Only four cities in England have directly elected mayors with executive responsibilities: London (as a result of acts only applicable to the city), Bristol (following a positive result in a local referendum in 2012), Leicester and Liverpool (which chose to establish mayors without holding a popular vote. These mayors can exercise a certain degree of autonomy from the central government, including the right to go beyond merely statutory tasks. Although the 2010 coalition agreement enabled other cities to opt for mayors, they all rejected the idea. Elected mayors are a feature of a small number of other local authorities.

The devolved Scottish Parliament and the Scottish executive have grown into major political actors whose rights, although theoretically revocable by Westminster, must be considered permanent for political reasons. Their Welsh and Northern Irish counterparts have considerable autonomy, but this differs in degree from that held by Scotland. Even if some decisions by the Scottish government have provoked Westminster (most notably in the case of tuition fees), the central state has not intervened.

Citation:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN05000/directlyelected-mayors>

National
Standards
Score: 7

There are supposed to be national standards for service delivery by local authorities or the parallel networks of agencies for specific policies such as the trusts running health care, but recent scandals have shown that implementation can be unsatisfactory and thus that there can be “postcode lotteries” in standards. Very recently, the Care Quality Commission, a body designed to oversee the quality of health and social care, has been criticized for a lack of transparency. Although the government has the capacity to ensure national standards on this issue, it is not doing enough to “watch the watchers.”

All members of the civil service are pledged to a range of codes (such as the Civil Service Code, the Directory of Civil Service Guidance, etc.) to ensure national standards in performance, conduct and delivery. In 2012, the Standards Board for England – which has scrutinized civil service commitments to the codes since 2000 – was abolished. The central government has encouraged local authorities to set up

regional standards boards. This is in line with the Localism Act 2011 which changed the powers and scrutiny of local government in England. The current Civil Service Reform, which started in 2012, sets a new range of national standards, especially in skills, accountability and transparency.

Citation:

HM Government 2012: The Civil Service Reform Plan; <http://resources.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Civil-Service-Reform-Plan-acc-final.pdf>

Adaptability

Domestic
Adaptability
Score: 5

The organization of ministries in the United Kingdom is a prerogative of the prime minister, and traditionally the precise division of tasks between ministries apart from the classic portfolios of foreign policy, defense, the Treasury, and the Home Office has been subject to considerable change. There is little evidence for international and supranational developments playing an important role in these decisions, in comparison with considerations of political expediency on the national level. However, UK government structures do change in some areas, with a clear example being the creation of the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) with an explicit remit to engage in international action to mitigate climate change.

The United Kingdom has in some areas been an early, and sometimes enthusiastic, proponent of norms and practices that have been championed by international bodies, including those overseeing financial stability. The Open Data Charter and the Open Data Partnership (in which the United Kingdom plays an active role) were brought to agreement under the United Kingdom's G8 presidency. There is often some resistance to policy recommendations stemming from the European Commission, but less so for the likes of the IMF – even when the messages are much the same. At the parliamentary level, European integration has led to procedural changes allowing Westminster to intervene early in the European policy-formulation process.

International
Coordination
Score: 8

The United Kingdom has long played a leading role in coordinating international initiatives, and the country's imperial legacy has contributed to its active stance on international commitments. It has played a leading role in recent years, for example, in efforts to eradicate poverty in Africa, promote reform in the financial sector and to combat climate change. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United Kingdom is very active in the United Nations and also plays a leading but sometimes polarizing role in NATO. Domestic politics have served as a drag on the United Kingdom's relations with its European partners and the European Union. Because of this, UK influence on EU contributions to global challenges has in recent years been somewhat diminished.

Organizational Reform

Self-
monitoring
Score: 5

Flexibility and informal meetings are a key feature of the British government system. The new coalition government has further reinforced this tradition. The downside is that little procedural structure exists to stabilize the expectations of actors and serve as guidance in case of crisis. But the flexibility to respond in a way uniquely tailored to the situation at hand has always been valued highly and is an essential constituent of prime ministerial government in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the Cabinet Office in particular has a remit to monitor the government's functioning. This self-monitoring has been bolstered by a renewed commitment to open government and the public release of data.

Monitoring by the executive is complemented by watchful media, parliamentary committees and various statutory bodies set up to monitor specific policy areas, occasionally leading to changes of approach. Trust in politicians has been damaged by a series of scandals in recent years – above all the parliamentary-expenses scandal – and shortcomings in local administrations have raised additional questions about the effectiveness of the monitoring system.

Institutional
Reform
Score: 8

As mentioned above, the organizational flexibility of both the core executive and the distribution of tasks to specific ministries is the core characteristic of the British system of government. Cabinet reorganizations and new institutional arrangements have often been the prime minister's weapon of choice to improve government performance. However, such reorganization can also be motivated by intra-party politics or public pressure, and it is difficult to systematically evaluate the success of specific measures in enhancing the strategic capacity of the government.

Very substantial changes in governance do occur, with recent examples including the restoration of a lead role in financial supervision to the Bank of England, the alteration of the basis for financial regulation, and a shift in the balance between state, market and external agencies in the delivery of public goods.

II. Executive Accountability

Citizens' Participatory Competence

Policy
Knowledge
Score: 7

The British government provides considerable information to its citizens through detailed websites, both at the core-executive and the ministerial level, and this flow has been progressively enhanced in recent years. These sites contain general information, progress reports and statistical data. However, the government does not

make much of an effort to ensure that citizens actually use this information. The most important source of knowledge for citizens is therefore TV broadcasting, followed by newspapers and radio.

According to an opinion poll by Ipsos MORI in 2010, 53% of those asked said that they had “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of knowledge about politics; 47% answered that they had “not very much” knowledge or knew “nothing at all.” The share of those claiming knowledge has risen over the previous decade by about 10 percentage points, indicating a subjectively better understanding of politics by citizens in the United Kingdom. A telling figure is that the proportion of citizens voting in certain television talent competitions is higher than in many national elections.

Citation:

Ipsos MORI 2011: Knowledge of Politics 2003-2010;

<http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2757/Knowledge-of-Politics-20032010.aspx?view=wide>

Legislative Actors' Resources

Parliamentary
Resources
Score: 6

Westminster MPs have relatively few resources at their disposal in terms of personnel capable of monitoring government activity. Parliamentary parties have few additional resources and therefore can provide little support. In addition, if a party is in government, a substantial part of their MPs will be (junior) members of the government and therefore not too keen to monitor themselves.

Parties in opposition are granted some public funds to hire additional researchers to fulfill their duties of controlling the government. But in terms of resources this is still not much compared to those the governing parties can call on through the ministerial bureaucracy.

Citation:

European Parliament / Directorate-General for Research 2000: Comparison of organizational and administrative arrangements in EU national parliaments; http://edz.bib.uni-mannheim.de/daten/edz-ma/ep/00/budg110_en.pdf

Obtaining
Documents
Score: 8

The “Osmotherly Rules” define the rights of select committees to obtain government documents. Like many internal parliamentary rules, however, they remain informal and cannot be legally challenged. However, documents are rarely held back and will thus be made available to committees. There are occasional disputes with government over the provision of specific information, and committees will then have to order the production of government documents. Their rights are thus not formally limited, but there is sometimes a political struggle between the committee and the government, although the struggle is usually mediated by the fact that the government party also has the majority on the committee, and party-political motives

thus rarely come into play. Freedom of Information requests can additionally be used to obtain documents, but this does not include documents that affect national security or public interests. The media reinforce parliamentary scrutiny through their strong influence and the keen interest they take in committee findings that challenge the serving government.

Summoning
Ministers
Score: 8

Ministers can be summoned to parliamentary committee hearings, but they cannot be forced to attend, because ministers have to be MPs, and MPs cannot be forced to attend any meeting. However, the Osmotherly Rules recommend that ministers accept invitations to a hearing as an act of respectful courtesy, and thus ministers will usually accept an invitation to a hearing in a select committee. It would be headline news and damaging to the minister in question if they refused to appear before a committee on anything remotely controversial, although the answers given to committees can be bland. Ministerial questions in plenary sessions of parliament complement the work of committees, and can be quite sharp in tone. The prime minister and key aides traditionally refuse to appear before select committees, but have appeared before the Liaison Committee, which is composed of the chairs of all the other committees.

Summoning
Experts
Score: 10

Parliamentary committees may summon expert witnesses who will usually provide any evidence willingly. Should they decline to do so, committees then have the power to order a witness to attend, though this would be exceptional.

Committees may also summon actors involved in an issue being investigated by a committee. For example, the examination by the Treasury Committee (in February 2009) of the deposed chairmen and chief executives of the Royal Bank of Scotland and HBOS following the public bailout of their banks, or of press barons in the context of the Leveson Inquiry into phone hacking by journalists.

Task Area
Congruence
Score: 7

Every government department is shadowed by a committee in the House of Commons (20 at the time of writing). The remit and number of committees adapts to reflect changes in the makeup of the government. House of Lords select committees focus on broader topics and are less directly matched to departmental task areas, but cover important areas – one example being the European Union Select Committee, which in turn has subcommittees that cover specific topics from an EU perspective such as economic and financial affairs or the environment.

However, the capacity of committees to monitor effectively is limited due to a lack of resources and limited continuity in membership (e.g., the House of Lords rules oblige members to be rotated off a committee after four years, although from direct observation of the work of its committees this does not seem to weaken them). Also, the number of reports they issue massively exceeds the time available on the floor of the House to debate them and, despite increased efforts by the committees to publicize them, not all reports achieve much media coverage.

Audit Office
Score: 10

The National Audit Office (NAO) is an independent office funded directly by

Ombuds Office
Score: 7

Parliament. Its head, the comptroller and auditor general, is an officer of the House of Commons. The NAO works on behalf of Parliament and the taxpayer to scrutinize public spending and is accountable to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

The British Parliament has a Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO), which looks into complaints if “government departments, their agencies and some other public bodies in the United Kingdom – and the NHS in England – have not acted properly or fairly or have provided poor services.” The PHSO can only be dissolved by an address by both houses. The resources of the PHSO are limited, with 435 full-time staff, as is their remit and their access to certain files (e.g., no formal power to see cabinet papers). Reports issued by the ombudsman are susceptible to judicial review by the courts. It is a function that seems to have faded from public visibility after being quite prominent when introduced in the 1960s. More than two-thirds of the 26,358 complaints investigated in the last year concerned health-service matters.

PHSO (2013) ‘Aiming for impact: annual report and accounts 2012-13’

Media

Media
Reporting
Score: 8

The main TV and radio stations in the United Kingdom – especially those like the BBC that operate under a public charter – provide an extensive array of high-quality news services. Government decisions feature prominently in this programming, and information and analysis on government decisions are both extensive and held to a high standard. There is substantial competition for viewers, in particular between the BBC, ITV, Sky and Channel 4. In addition to news programs, all provide in-depth analysis programs on politics and policy in a variety of formats. The Today Programme on BBC Radio 4 is well-known for its highbrow political analysis and scrutiny, and often sets the tone for political debates; Newsnight is the flagship political-news program on TV.

The style of interview on these programs is often explicitly not deferential, and even quite confrontational – especially toward ministers. This is justified by the need to hold politicians and especially government ministers to account. Local radio and press also have a tangible influence within their localities and an increasing number of people resort to online services, most notably BBC Online, as a source of information on government.

Scandals both in the private sector (News of the World) and the public sector (BBC) may have cost some credibility but have so far had no recognizable influence on the functioning of the media system as a whole. Despite political pressure, The Guardian newspaper played a crucial role in the global surveillance disclosures of 2013, and was awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for its efforts.

Intra-party
Democracy
Score: 5

Parties and Interest Associations

A distinction needs to be made for all major parties between the election of the leader (for which party members do have a say) and the selection of other personnel or decisions over major issues, for which there are generally much more restrictive procedures. The selection of candidates for parliaments and local councils usually involves local party members. Annual party conferences notionally have a major role in settling policy positions, but in practice it is party leaders that play the biggest role.

The Conservative Party restricts decision-making to party members. In most cases, a number of selected delegates participate in the most important personnel and issue decisions. Central party influence over local candidate selection – and all candidates are local candidates in Britain – has varied in recent years. David Cameron introduced a “priority list” with at least 50% women and significant representation from ethnic minorities, from which all target seats and Conservative-held seats were supposed to be selected. In the run-up to the 2010 election and in the wake of the parliamentary expenses scandal, necessity dictated a loosening of the rules. After the election, selection rules reverted to the post-2005 procedure.

The party leader is elected by a poll of all party members, who have to choose from a shortlist of two which has been decided by the parliamentary Conservative Party – that is, all Conservative MPs.

The Labour Party restricts decision-making to party members. In most cases, a number of selected delegates participate in the most important personnel and issue decisions. Central party influence over local candidate selection has varied over time – since 1988 there has had to be at least one woman on every shortlist. Since 2001, candidates require approval by party HQ before they can be selected by constituency Labour parties.

The selection of the party leader has also undergone changes in recent years. There is an electoral college which consists of three elements, namely the parliamentary Labour Party, the constituency Labour Party, and the trade unions and affiliated organizations. Each of the elements is balloted individually using a “one member, one vote” system; the results for each segment make up a third of the final vote. Since 2007, the winning candidate has been required to have the support of 50% of the vote, so the election process takes several rounds as the candidates with the fewest votes drop out and have their second preferences redistributed until the winning candidate has reached the required quorum.

The Liberal Democrats restrict decision-making to party members. In most cases, all party members have the opportunity to participate in the most important decisions

Association
Competence
(Business)
Score: 7

and choice of personnel. Lists of candidates and agendas of issues are fairly open.

Major business associations propose practical policy solutions which are rooted in a realistic assessment of the circumstances in which they will be carried out. Since the polarization between the major parties has been reduced substantially over the last two decades (especially in the field of socioeconomic policy matters), there is little incentive for business associations to engage in wishful thinking if they want to be taken seriously in the national policy discourse. However, some economic interests do propose somewhat more provocative ideas.

The crisis and the ongoing economic decline have sharpened the tone in some interest associations' publications. The main issue here is not so much whether economic-interest associations are capable of formulating viable policies, but that even when they do, they have limited influence on the policy process.

Association
Competence
(Others)
Score: 8

The United Kingdom has a tradition of close scrutiny of policy proposals. The quality and realism of policy proposals determines the degree to which any interest group is taken seriously in the country's national political discourse and there are many NGOs which have had a tangible impact on policy thinking. Green interest groups in particular have helped to shape the policies of successive governments. There are vocal campaigners for rural interests, while both sides of the migration debate have been nourished by interest groups.

There is an abundance of NGOs with often-narrow policy agendas that tend to be pushed forward with small consideration for the wider ramifications of the pursuit of their issue. By the same token, the diversity of such bodies allows a wide range of proposals to obtain a hearing.

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