

Dictionary of Key Terms in UK Politics

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(Page references relate to Essentials of UK Politics, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Absolute monarchy: A monarchy that is invested with sovereign power, ensuring that all other bodies are subordinate to authority of the king or queen; absolute monarchies are usually based on the doctrine of 'divine right'.

Act: A statute law; a bill that has completed its various parliamentary stages and become an Act of Parliament.

Additional member system (AMS): A 'mixed' voting system that is made up of a constituency-based 'first past the post' element and a regional party-list element, the latter being a 'top-up' to achieve the highest possible level of proportionality (see p. 73).

Adjournment debate: A debate, initiated by one or more backbenchers, that is held at the end of the parliamentary day.

Administrative devolution: A form of devolution in which regional/national bodies implement policies that are made elsewhere.

Administrative law: The body of law that governs the exercise of powers and duties by public authorities.

Adversary politics: A form of politics that is characterized by deep ideological conflicts between major parties; the parties offer rival ideological visions.

Age of majority: The age at which adulthood begins, in the eyes of the law; reflecting the idea that a person has 'majority control' over him- or herself.

Alternative vote: A voting system in which electors vote preferentially and lower placed candidates drop out in succession with their vote being redistributed until one candidate gains 50 per cent.

Apathy: The absence of interest in or enthusiasm about a subject, usually reflected in inactivity.

Asymmetrical devolution: A form of devolution that operates differently in different regions, with no common pattern of devolved powers and responsibilities within the state.

Athenian democracy: The form of democracy that operated in ancient Athens, characterized by a system of government by mass meeting supplemented by the allocation of government posts on the basis of lot or rota (see p. 33).

Authority: The right to influence the behaviour of others, based on an acknowledged duty to obey.

Authoritarianism: The practice of rule 'from above'; government that is imposed on citizens regardless of their consent.

Autocracy: Literally, self-rule; rule by a single person who exercises his or her power in an arbitrary manner.

AV plus: A mixed voting system consisting of the alternative vote (AV) and the party list, which is used as a top-up; SV is a version of AV.

Backbencher: An MP who does not hold a ministerial or 'shadow' ministerial post; so-called because they tend to sit on the back benches.

Backbench revolt: Disunity by backbench MPs, who vote against their party on a 'whipped' vote.

Barnett formula: The formula (devised by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Joel, later Lord, Barnett) for determining the level of funding from UK taxes of expenditure in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Bicameralism: The division of legislative power through the creation of a two-chamber legislature; full bicameralism requires that the chambers have equal or at least equivalent power (see p. 219).

Bill: A legislative proposal that is in the process of being considered by Parliament; a proposed law.

Bill of rights: A document that specifies the rights and freedoms of the individual, and so defines the extent of civil liberty; bills of rights may have an entrenched or statutory status (see p. 282).

Bureaucracy: The administrative machinery of government; literally it means 'rule by officials'.

Butskellism: A term made up from the names of the Conservative chancellor R. A. Butler and the Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, indicating an overlap in party policies.

Cabinet: The committee of leading ministers which is empowered to make official government policy.

Cabinet collegiality: A sense of solidarity among cabinet members borne out of loyalty to the government and an awareness that they stand or fall together.

Cabinet committee: A sub-committee of the full cabinet, created and staffed by the prime minister, which considers a particular aspect of government policy (see p. 246).

Cabinet government: The principle that (1) the cabinet 'fuses' the executive and legislative branches of government, and (2) cabinet decisions are made democratically, with the prime minister being merely 'first among equals' (see p.237).

Cabinet Office: The body that services the cabinet system, through the cabinet secretariat, and is responsible for co-ordinating policy across Whitehall departments and ensuring effective policy delivery; the nerve centre of government.

Cabinet system: The cabinet and the network of bodies linked to it, notably committees, sub-committees and the Cabinet Secretariat.

Capitalism: An economic system in which wealth is owned privately and economic life is organized according to the market.

Catch-all party: A party that develops policies that will appeal to the widest range of voters, by contrast with a programmatic party.

Cause group: A pressure group that exists to advance particular values, ideals and principles.

Celtic fringe: Areas associated with the Celtic languages in Northern Scotland, Wales and Cornwall (and, by extension, south-east England).

Chequebook group: A pressure group in which activism is restricted to full-time professionals with the mass membership serving primarily as a source of financial support (through subscriptions and donations).

Citizens' jury: A panel of non-specialists, often randomly chosen, used to deliberate on and express views about issues of public policy.

Citizenship: A relationship between the individual and the state in which the two are bound together by reciprocal rights and duties; citizens, most simply, are members of the state (see p. 57).

Civil disobedience: Law-breaking that is justified by reference to 'higher' religious, moral or political principles; breaking the law to 'make a point'.

Civil liberties: A range of rights and freedoms that belong to the citizen and mark out a 'private' realm which government should leave alone (see p. 272).

Civil servant: A government official whose role is to either provide policy advice or to carry out government policy; civil servants are formally subordinate to ministers and are required to be politically neutral.

Civil society: The sphere of independent bodies, groups and associations that operate outside government control (including families, businesses and pressure groups).

Class dealignment: A weakening of the relationship between social class and party support, typically reflected in a decline in class voting (see p. 83).

Class voter: Either a working-class Labour voter or a middle-class Conservative voter.

Closed list: A version of the party-list system where voters only vote for political parties and have no influence over which individual candidates are elected, unlike 'open' lists.

Coalition government: A government in which power is shared between two or more parties, based on the distribution among them of ministerial posts (see p. 76).

Codified constitution: A constitution in which key constitutional provisions are collected together within a single legal document, popularly known as a written constitution or the constitution.

Collective ministerial responsibility: A constitutional convention that defines the relationship (1) between the executive and Parliament (government rests on the confidence of the elected House of Commons), and (2) between ministers and the cabinet (all ministers must support official government policy, or else resign) (see p. 233).

Committee of the Whole House: A meeting of the full chamber of the House of Commons to consider the committee stage of a government bill.

Common law: Law that is based on long-standing customs and traditions; common law is used mainly in the UK and its former colonies.

Communitarianism: The belief that people are happier and more secure if they live within communities that have clear values and a strong culture.

Conflict: Competition between opposing forces, based on the existence of different opinions, wants and needs.

Consensus politics: An overlap of ideological positions between two or more political parties; an agreement about fundamental policy goals that permits disagreement on matters of detail or emphasis.

Conservatism: An ideology that is characterized by support for tradition, duty, authority and property; conservative ideas range from One Nation beliefs to Thatcherism or the New Right (see p. 109).

Constitution: A set of rules (written or unwritten) that set out to establish the duties, powers and functions of the institutions of government, the relationships

between them, and the relationship the state and its citizens; the rules that govern the government (see p. 165).

Constitutional democracy: A form of democracy that operates within a clear constitutional framework that both disperses government power and protects minorities and individuals (see p. 45).

Constitutional monarchy: A monarchy that operates within a framework of legal and constitutional constraints that deny it absolute power.

Constituency: An electoral unit that returns one or more representatives, or the body of voters who are so represented.

Convention: A non-legal rule; a rule of conduct or behaviour.

Conviction politics: A style of politics in which party policies are shaped by the ideological convictions of its leader.

Core executive: An informal network of bodies and actors that play a key role in the policy process (see p. 242).

Corporatism: The incorporation of key economic groups into the processes of government, creating a partnership between government, business and labour.

Core voters: Voters who support the same party time and time again, reflecting a strong allegiance towards a particular party.

Council tax: A revised version of the rating system in which property is taxed according to eight bands (A to H), with a 25 per cent discount for single occupants.

Cultural nationalism: The regeneration of the nation as a distinctive civilization, stressing the need to defend or strengthen a national language, religion or way of life.

Cyberactivism: Political action based on the use of 'new' technology – the Internet, mobile phones, e-petitions, electronic voting, and so on.

Delegate: A person who is chosen to act for another on the basis of clear guidance or instructions; delegates do not think for themselves.

Delegated legislation: Laws that allow other bodies to act with Parliament's legal authority; secondary or enabling legislation.

Deliberative democracy: A form of democracy in which the public interest is decided through debate, discussion and argument, amongst either representatives or private citizens.

Democracy: A political system in which the major decisions that affect society are made, directly or indirectly, by the people themselves, with each citizen having an equal right to have a say and to make his or her opinion count (see p. 31).

Devolution: An intermediate tier of government between central and local government, which has regional or (in the UK) national jurisdiction; devolved bodies have no share in sovereignty (see p. 298).

'Dignified' parts: Long established and widely respected bodies that serve to make the political process intelligible to the mass of people (according to Bagehot).

Direct action: Political action that is direct in that it imposes sanctions that affect government or the running of the country; direct action is often (but not necessarily) illegal.

Direct democracy: A form of democracy that is based on the direct, unmediated and continuous participation of citizens in the tasks of government; sometimes known as 'classical', 'participatory' or 'radical' democracy (see p. 32).

Due process: The proper conduct of legal proceedings, involving, in particular, respect for an individual's legal rights.

Election: A method of filling an office or post through choices made by a designated body of people: the electorate.

Elective dictatorship: A constitutional imbalance in which the power of the executive is limited only by the need to gain re-election, brought about by the domination of a sovereign Parliament by the government of the day (see p. 179).

Electoral reform: A change in the rules governing elections, usually involving the replacement of one electoral system by another; in the UK the term is invariably associated with the reform of FPTP and the adoption of a PR system.

Elitism: The theory that political power is concentrated in the hands of the few, an elite, sometimes called a 'power elite'.

Ethnicity: A sense of loyalty towards a particular population or territorial area; ethnic bonds are cultural rather than racial.

Euro-federalism: The trend towards the establishment of a 'federal Europe', in which member states and EU bodies both enjoy a share in sovereignty.

Euroscepticism: Opposition to the process of European integration, based on a defence of national sovereignty and national identity; Eurosceptics are not necessarily anti-European.

Executive: The branch of government that is responsible for the implementation of laws and policies made by Parliament.

Expert authority: Respect for people's views based on their specialist knowledge; to be 'an' authority rather than 'in' authority.

External sovereignty: The state's capacity to act independently and autonomously on the international stage; external sovereignty defines a state's relationship to other states.

Faction: A group of like-minded politicians, usually formed around a key leader or in support of a set of preferred policies.

Federal constitution: A constitution that is based on the principle of shared sovereignty, in that there are two relatively autonomous levels of government, the national/federal and the regional/state.

Federalism: The existence of two distinct levels of government, each of which has a measure of constitutional autonomy; federalism is based on the principle of shared sovereignty (see p. 302).

Feminism: A commitment to an improvement in the social role of women, usually reflected in a sense to promote sexual equality.

First past the post (FPTP): A voting system that is based on a collection of single-member constituencies in which winning candidates need only achieve a plurality of votes; sometimes called the single-member plurality system or SMP (see p. 69).

Floating (or swing) voters: Voters with few or no long-term party loyalties, who therefore vote for different parties in different elections.

Focus group: A small cross-section of people who are used to gain insight into the wider public views.

Free market: The principle or policy of unrestricted market competition, free from government interference.

Free vote: A vote in which there is no 'party line', allowing MPs to think for themselves and vote independently.

Frontbencher: An MP who holds a ministerial or 'shadow' ministerial post, and who usually sits on the front benches.

Functional representation: The representation of groups based on their function within the economy or society; examples include industries, employers, professions, workers, and so on.

General election: A full parliamentary election in which all the seats in the House of Commons come up for re-election; general elections take place within a five-year maximum term, as decided by the prime minister.

Global governance: The capacity of international bodies such as the UN, NATO, the World Bank and the WTO to co-ordinate world affairs and influence the actions of states.

Government: A set of institutions through which the general rules of society (usually called laws) are made and enforced.

Green Paper: A consultative document that usually outlines a range of legislative options.

Hereditary Peer: A member of the House of Lords who holds an inherited title which also carries the right to sit in the Lords; since 1999, only 92 Hereditary Peers have been permitted to sit in the Lords.

House of Commons: The first or 'lower' chamber of Parliament; the Commons is composed of elected MPs and is legislatively and constitutionally superior to the House of Lords.

House of Lords: The second or 'upper' chamber of Parliament; the Lords is entirely non-elected and is legislatively and constitutionally inferior to the House of Commons.

Human rights: Rights to which people are entitled by virtue of being human; human rights are universal, fundamental and absolute (see p. 267).

'Hung' Parliament: A parliament in which no single party has majority control in the House of Commons.

Ideology: An 'ism'; a more or less coherent set of ideas, values and theories that help to explain the world and guide political action.

Individual ministerial responsibility: A constitutional convention that defines the relationship between a minister and his or her department, implying that ministers are responsible to Parliament for the policies and actions of their departments, possible up to the point of resignation (see p. 234).

Initiative: A procedure, usually using a petition, through which the public can call a referendum or force politicians to consider a legislative proposal.

Insider group: A pressure group that enjoys regular, privileged and usually institutionalized access to government.

Interest group: A pressure group that exists to advance or protect the (usually material) interests of its members.

Intergovernmentalism: A form of interaction between states that takes place on the basis of sovereign independence, meaning that states cannot be forced to act against their will.

Internal sovereignty: The state's supreme authority over its internal affairs, located in a body or bodies that have unchallengeable constitutional authority; internal sovereignty defines a state's relationship to the individuals, groups and institutions within its borders.

International law: The rules that define the behaviour of, and relationship between, states; the UN is the main source of international law.

Judge-made law: Law that is 'made' by judges through their ability to determine common law, which is effectively built up on the basis of judicial precedent, operating through 'case law'.

Judicial activism: The willingness of judges to arbitrate in political disputes, as opposed to merely declaring the 'letter of the law'.

Judicial independence: The principle that the actions and decisions of judges should not be influenced by pressure from other branches of government.

Judicial neutrality: The principle that judges should not be affected by political, social or personal biases of any kinds, allowing their decisions to be determined by strictly legal considerations.

Judicial review: The power of the judiciary to 'review' and possibly overturn laws, decrees and actions of other branches of government and public bodies.

Judiciary: The branch of government that is responsible for deciding legal disputes and which presides over the court system.

Jury principle: The idea that a randomly chosen group of people can express the views of the wider public (their peers).

Kitchen cabinet: A loose and informal group of policy advisors consulted by the prime minister outside the formal cabinet, including senior ministers, officials and special advisors.

Laissez-faire: (French) Literally, to leave to do; the principle of the non-interference of government in economic life, implying that 'the economy works best when left alone by government'.

Laissez-faire leadership: A 'hands-off' style of political leadership in which the leader delegates substantial responsibility to subordinate figures who therefore play a significant role in formulating policy.

Law: A set of public and enforceable rules that apply throughout a state; there are a number of forms of law in the UK – statute law, common law, EU law and so on.

Law Lord: A senior judge who is entitled to sit in the House of Lords; technically known as a 'Lord of Appeal in Ordinary'.

Leadership style: The strategies and patterns of behaviour through which a leader seeks to achieve his or her goals.

Left (The): People who hold generally optimistic views about human nature and have a positive attitude to social change; left-wingers tend to support liberty, equality and fraternity.

Legal sovereignty: Supreme legal authority, reflected in an unchallengeable right to establish any law one wishes.

Legislative devolution: A form of devolution which operates through elected regional/national assemblies that are invested with policy-making responsibilities and usually have some tax raising powers.

Legislature: The branch of government that has the power to make laws through the formal enactment of legislation (statutes).

Legitimacy: Rightfulness; legitimacy confers on a command or order an authoritative or binding character, meaning that it should be obeyed.

Liberal democracy: A form of indirect and representative democracy which combines the 'liberal' goal of limited government with a 'democratic' commitment to elections and popular participation (see p. 9).

Liberalism: An ideology that is based on a commitment to individualism, freedom, toleration and consent; modern liberalism favours qualified intervention while classical liberalism supports the minimal state (see p. 121).

Life Peer: A member of the House of Lords who is entitled to sit in the Lords for his or her own lifetime; Life Peers are appointed by the prime minister, with recommendations being made by opposition leaders.

Limited government: A form of government in which government power is subject to limitations and checks, providing protection for the individual; the opposite of arbitrary government.

Lobby fodder: MPs who speak and vote (in the lobbies) as their parties dictate without thinking for themselves.

Local democracy: The principle that local decisions should be made in line with local wishes, implying both local elections and a measure of local autonomy (freedom from the centre).

Local government: A system of local councils that have jurisdiction at parish, district, town/city and county levels, subject to the authority of Parliament.

Lord: A member of the House of Lords; there are various kinds of Lords – Life Peers, Hereditary Peers, Law Lords and the Lords Spiritual.

Lords Spiritual: A member who sits in the House of Lords by virtue of being a bishop or archbishop of the Church of England; other peers as known as the 'Lords Temporal'.

Majoritarian democracy: A form of democracy that is based on the principle of majority rule and emphasizes the general or collective interests of society, rather than particular interests (see p. 45).

Majoritarian system: An electoral system that tends to 'over-represent' larger parties and usually results in single-party majority government.

Majority rule: The rule that the views or interests of the majority should take precedence over those of the minority, as the majority speak for the people.

Mandate: An instruction or command that gives authority to a person or body to act in a particular way.

Mandatory sentences: Sentences that are laid down in legislation, and so remove discretion over sentences from judges.

Manifesto: A pamphlet that outlines (in more or less detail) the policies or programme a party intends to introduce if elected to power.

Marginal seat: A seat or constituency with a small majority, which is therefore 'winnable' by more than one party.

Mass media: Social institutions that are concerned with the production and distribution of all forms of knowledge, information and entertainment, including the 'broadcast' media (radio and television) and the 'print' media (newspapers and magazines), but also increasingly the 'new' media (especially the Internet).

Member of Parliament: An elected member of the House of Commons.

Microcosm: Literally a little world; a miniature version of a larger body, but exact in its features and proportions.

Minimal state: A state that only maintains domestic order, enforces legal agreements and protects against external attack, leaving other matters in the hands of the individual.

Minister: A member of the government, with (usually) a designated departmental responsibility, ranging from secretary of state (departmental boss) to parliamentary undersecretary of state; cabinet ministers are often distinguished from junior ministers.

Minority government: A government that does not have overall majority support in the assembly or parliament; minority governments are usually formed by single parties that are unable, or unwilling, to form coalitions.

Monarchy: A head of state who gains his or her title through inheritance or dynastic succession; monarchy may be absolute or constitutional.

Monetary union: The establishment of a single European currency, the euro, regulated by the European Central Bank.

Money bill: A bill that contains significant financial measures, as determined by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Multiculturalism: The belief that different cultural groups have the right to respect and recognition; a positive approach to cultural diversity.

Multilevel governance: A complex policy process in which political authority is distributed horizontally and vertically between subnational, national and supranational levels of government.

Multiparty system: A party system in which more than two parties compete for power with no single party having the prospect of governing alone; multiparty systems are characterized by minority or coalition government (see p. 107).

Nationalism: The belief that the nation is, or should be, the central principle of political organization, usually reflected in the desire to establish or defend a nation-state (see p. 299).

Nationalization: The extension of state control over the economy through the transfer of industries from private ownership to public ownership.

Nation: A group of people who share a common language, religion, traditions and culture and regard themselves as a natural political community.

National veto: The power of member states to block Council of Ministers' decisions on matters that threaten vital national interests.

Nation-state: A state in which the population have a shared national identity, based (usually) on the same language, religion, traditions and history.

Neoconservatism: A form of conservatism that emphasises the need to strengthen order, authority and discipline and calls for society to be based on common moral and cultural beliefs.

Neoliberalism: An updated version of classical liberalism that is committed to free-market economics and 'rugged' or self-reliant individualism.

Neutrality: The absence of any form of partisanship or commitment; a refusal to 'take sides'.

New working class: Workers who tend to work in service or 'sunrise' industries, are less unionized and are often home owners.

Non-governmental organization: A not-for-profit group that draws members from more than one country and is active at an international level.

Ombudsman: A public officer appointed to safeguard citizens' rights and investigate allegations of maladministration; the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, set up in 1967, acts as the 'parliamentary ombudsman'.

One Nation conservatism: A pragmatic and paternalistic form of conservatism that favours social reform to narrow (but not remove) social inequalities (see p. 111).

Open government: A free flow of information from government to representative bodies, the mass media and the electorate, based on the public's 'right to know'.

Opposition day: A day in which opposition parties may choose the subject for debate in Parliament; sometime called 'supply days'.

Opposition, the: The largest party in the House of Commons outside of government (usually the second largest party); most generally, all parties outside of government as designated as opposition parties.

Outsider group: A pressure group that is either not consulted by government or consulted only irregularly and not usually at a senior level.

Parliament: The UK's legislature, composed of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarchy (the 'Crown in Parliament'); more generally, a parliament is a forum for debate and discussion (from the French *parlé*).

Parliamentary democracy: A form of democracy that operates in and through a deliberative assembly, which both represents the people and makes government accountable; a system of representative and responsible government (see p. 41).

Parliamentary government: A system in which government governs in and through Parliament, based on a 'fusion' between the legislative and executive branches of government; the legislature and executive are therefore overlapping and interlocking institutions (see p. 205).

Parliamentary privilege: A set of legal privileges intended to safeguard MPs and peers from outside interference, notably the right to absolute freedom of speech within Parliament.

Parliamentary sovereignty: The principle of the absolute and unlimited legal authority of Parliament, operating through its ability to make, unmake and amend any law it wishes (see p. 174).

Partisan dealignment: A decline in the extent to which people align themselves with a political party by identifying with it, leading to more volatile and less predictable voting patterns (see p. 84).

Party government: A system through which single parties are able to form governments and carry through policy programmes, supposedly on the basis of a popular mandate gained through an election victory (see p. 99).

Party list: A voting system in which electors vote for parties that are allocated seats in direct proportion to the votes, which are filled party list; the regional party list operates through large multimember constituencies (see p. 75).

Partisanship: A bias or preference in favour of a particular group or body, expressed through affection, loyalty and support.

Paternalism: Acting in the interests of others who are unable to make informed moral decisions, supposedly as fathers do in relation to children.

Patronage: The granting of favours or privileges; patronage usually involves control over jobs and appointments.

Peak group: A group that coordinates the activities of different pressure groups in the same area of interest; peak groups often work closely with government.

People's Peer: A Life Peer who has been appointed on the basis of individual recommendation to the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Permissiveness: The willingness to allow people to make their own moral choices or to 'do their own thing' because there are no authoritative values.

Plebiscite: Literally, a popular vote; equivalent to a referendum.

Pluralism: The theory that power in society is widely and evenly dispersed, rather than concentrated in the hands of an elite or ruling class; more generally, pluralism refers to diversity or multiplicity (the existence of many things) (see p. 143).

Pluralist democracy: A form of democracy that operates through the capacity of organized groups to articulate popular demands and ensure government responsiveness.

Plurality: The largest number out of a collection of numbers; a 'simple' majority, not necessarily an 'absolute' majority.

Poll tax: A flat-rate tax on individuals (a 'head tax').

Policy network: Links between government and non-governmental bodies (including well-placed lobbyists, sympathetic academics, leading journalists and others) through which policy proposals are developed.

Political generation: The (alleged) tendency for a generation of voters to remain loyal to the party that was dominant when they were young.

Political nationalism: The reconfiguring of the state along national lines, usually based on the principle of national self-determination.

Political party: A group of people that is organized for the purpose of winning government power; parties typically adopt a broad issue focus and are united by shared political preferences and a general ideological identity (see p. 97).

Political sovereignty: Absolute political power, reflected in an unrestricted ability to act however one wishes (see p. 292).

Political union: The establishment of common citizenship rights within the EU and a strengthening of EU institutions to ensure common policies in designated areas.

Political will: A determination to achieve desired outcomes based on an assured understanding of the means of achieving them.

Politics: The activity through which people make, uphold and revise the general rules under which they live.

Pooled sovereignty: The combination of the national sovereignties of member states to enhance their power and influence; the whole is greater than its parts.

Popular sovereignty: The principle that supreme authority is vested in the people directly, rather than in a representative institution.

Power: The ability to influence the behaviour of others, usually through rewards or punishment.

President: A head of state who also has formal control over the executive branch of government (an executive president); presidents are not subject to the principle of cabinet government.

Presidential government: A system in which there is a strict separation of powers and of personnel between the executive and legislative branches of government.

Presidentialism: The tendency for political leaders to act increasingly like executive presidents, through the rise of personalized leadership.

Pressure group: An organized group of people that aims to influence the policies and actions of government, in line with either the common interests of its members or a shared belief in a cause (see p. 131).

Primary legislative power: The ability to make law on matters which have been devolved from Westminster.

Prime minister: The head of government and chair of the cabinet.

Prime ministerial government: The theory that (1) the executive and legislature are 'fused' through the office of the prime minister, and (2) the prime minister dominates executive policy-making, the cabinet simply being a subordinate body (see p. 239).

Prime Minister's Office: A collection of senior officials and political advisors (numbering over 100) who advise the prime minister about policy and implementation, communications, party management and government relations.

Private member's bill: A bill that is proposed by an MP who is not a member of the government, usually through an annual ballot.

Privatization: The selling off of nationalized industries and other state assets, transferring them from the public to the private sector.

Programmatic party: A party that develops policies within a framework of long-term goals and established values and is bound together by shared ideological loyalties, even though these are often broadly defined.

Progressive taxation: A system of taxation in which the rich pay proportionally more in tax than the poor, usually based on graduated direct taxes.

Proportional representation: The principle that parties should be represented in an assembly or parliament in direct proportion to their overall electoral strength.

Proportional system: An electoral system that tends to represent parties in-line with their electoral support, often portrayed as proportional representation.

Public accountability: The process through which politicians are forced to answer for their actions to the public or its elected representatives; accountability implies politicians can be removed.

Public bill committee: A parliamentary committee whose role is to examine the details of a government bill line by line.

Public opinion: Views shared by members of the public on political issues; the views of many or most voters.

Qualified majority voting: A system of voting within an EU Council of Ministers in which different majorities are needed on different issues, with states' votes weighed (roughly) according to size.

Quango: A quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization: a public body staffed by appointees rather than politicians or civil servants.

Quasi-federalism: A division of powers between central and regional government that has some of the features of federalism without possessing a formal federal structure.

Question Time: The parliamentary procedure through which ministers are asked oral questions by MPs or peers; the best known aspect of Question Time is Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs), which take place weekly.

Quorum: The minimum number of people whose presence is required for proper or valid decisions to be taken.

Racism: Prejudice or hostility towards others based on their ethnic or racial origins.

Rates: A property-based local government tax that was linked to the notional rental value of residential and business properties.

Recall election: A special election, (usually) precipitated by a popular petition, that forces an official to seek re-election (and possibly be removed) before the end of his or her term in office.

Referendum: A vote in which the electorate expresses a view on a particular issue of public policy; referendums are a device of direct democracy, used to supplement, not replace, elections (see p. 43).

Representation: A relationship through which an individual or group stands for, or acts on behalf of, a larger body of people (see p. 65).

Representative democracy: A limited and indirect form of democracy which operates through the ability of representatives to speak for, or act on behalf of, the people; representative democracy usually operates through the mechanism of elections (see p. 35).

Republicanism: A form of Northern Ireland nationalism that is committed to creating a united Ireland through the incorporation of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland; the dominant political position of Ulster Catholics.

Responsible government: A government that is answerable or accountable to an elected assembly and, through it, to the people.

Right (The): People who tend to be pessimistic about human nature and oppose change; right-wingers tend to favour order, authority and duty.

Royal Assent: The monarch's agreement to legislation passed by the two houses of Parliament; by signing a Bill it becomes an Act.

Royal Prerogative: The body of powers, immunities and privileges that are recognized in common law as belonging to the Crown; these powers are now more commonly exercised by ministers than by the monarch.

Rule of law: The principle that law should 'rule', in the sense that it applies to all conduct or behaviour and covers both private citizens and public officials.

Safe seat: A seat or constituency that rarely changes hands and is consistently won by the same party.

Scrutiny: Examining something in a close or detailed way.

Secondary legislative power: The ability to vary some laws passed by the Houses of Parliament, creating dependency on Westminster legislation.

Secret ballot: A ballot in which the casting of votes is private and protected from public scrutiny.

Select committee: A parliamentary committee whose role is to scrutinize government policy; departmental select committees (DSCs) shadow the work of each of the major government departments.

Separation of powers: The principle that the three key branches of government (the legislature, executive and judiciary) should be separate and independent institutions, giving rise to a network of checks and balances amongst them (see p. 264).

Single transferable vote (STV): A voting system that operates through preferential voting in multimember constituencies, in which candidates are elected if they achieve a quota of votes (based on the Droop formula) (see p. 74).

Social capital: The levels of trust and sense of social connectedness that help to promote stability, cohesion and prosperity; what turns the 'I' into the 'we'.

Social class: A group of people who share a similar social and economic position usually based on their occupation.

Social conservatism: The belief that order, authority and discipline provide the basis for a stable and healthy society.

Social democracy: An ideological stance that favours a broad balance between a capitalist or market economy on the one hand and state intervention on the other; social democrats seek to reform or 'humanize' capitalism (see p. 110).

Social justice: A morally justifiable distribution of wealth, usually implying a desire to reduce material inequalities (rather than absolute equality).

Social liberalism: A commitment to social welfare designed to promote equal opportunities and to help individuals to help themselves.

Social movement: A large group of people who are distinguished by common aspirations and a high level of political commitment, but often lacking clear organization.

Socialism: An ideology that is characterised by a belief in community, cooperation, equality and common ownership; socialist theories range from communism to social democracy (see p. 108).

Sovereignty: The principle of absolute and unlimited power, often seen as the defining feature of the state; sovereignty may be either internal or external, or legal or political in character.

Spatial leadership: A style of leadership that distances party leaders and particularly prime ministers (giving them 'space') from their parties and governments by emphasizing the importance of their personal ideological beliefs or vision.

'Special relationship': A strong and close relationship between the UK and the USA, supposedly based on language and cultural similarities and common support for the values of capitalism and representative government.

Spin: A biased portrayal of an event or information designed to elicit a favourable or unfavourable response.

State: A political association that establishes sovereign control within defined territorial borders.

Statute law: Law that is made by Parliament, otherwise known as Acts of Parliament.

Strong government: A situation in which government can govern, in the sense of translating its legislative programme into public policy.

Subsidiarity: The principle that, within a federal-type system, decisions should be made at the lowest possible level.

Superpower: A state with overwhelming nuclear military capacity and global territorial influence; the term is usually reserved for the USA and the Soviet Union.

Supplementary vote (SV): A voting system in which electors express a first and a second ('supplementary') preference, with winning candidates needing to gain a minimum of 50 per cent of the votes cast; a version of the alternative vote (see p. 77).

Supply-side economics: Economic policies that are designed to encourage producers to produce, usually by cutting taxes, removing regulations or promoting labour flexibility.

Supranationalism: The existence of a supranational body that is higher than the nation-state and capable of imposing its will on it.

Tactical voting: Voting not for a preferred party but for a 'least bad' party or to defeat a 'worst' party.

Thatcherism: An ideological stance that is committed to the goal of a strong but minimal state, achieved by 'rolling back' economic intervention but consolidating state authority over moral and social matters (see p. 112).

Think tank: A pressure group specifically formed to develop policy proposals and campaign for their acceptance amongst opinion formers and policy-makers.

Third way: The idea of an alternative to both 'top-down' Keynesian social democracy and the free-market policies of Thatcherism.

Traditional working class: Manual workers who tend to work in 'heavy' industries (e.g. coal, steel and shipbuilding), have high levels of union membership and are dependent on public services, including council housing.

Transactional leadership: A style of political leadership in which the leader acts as a 'broker', concerned to uphold the collective face of his or her party or government by negotiating compromises and balancing rivalries.

Transformational leadership: A style of political leadership in which the leader acts the architect of ideological or policy change, by setting out a personal vision and seeking to impose it on his or her party or government; transformational leadership is associated with 'presidentialism'.

Trustee: A person who has formal (and usually legal) responsibility for another's property or affairs.

Two-party system: A party system that is dominated by two 'major' parties that have a roughly equal prospect of winning government power; two-party systems are characterized single-party government and an alternation in power (see p. 105).

Ultra vires: Literally, 'beyond the power'; this applies when public servants have acted illegally because their actions have no statutory authority.

Uncodified constitution: A constitution that is made up of rules that are found in a variety of sources, in the absence of a single legal document or written constitution.

Union state: A state made up of regions that retain their own distinctive cultural (and possibly national) traditions and identities.

Unionism: A form of Northern Ireland nationalism that seeks to uphold the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the dominant political tradition of Ulster Protestants.

Unitary constitution: A constitution that concentrates sovereign power in a single body of national government.

Unitary state: A state in which sovereignty is concentrated in a single institution of central government; the centre therefore determines the powers and responsibilities of lower levels of government.

Universal suffrage: The right of all adult citizens to vote (however 'adulthood' is defined).

Vote of confidence: A vote on the life of the government itself; if defeated, the government is obliged to call a general election.

Wasted vote: A vote that does not affect the outcome of the election because it is cast for a 'losing' candidate or for a candidate who already has a plurality of votes.

Welfare-to-work: Welfare programmes that boost employability skills and provide incentives for people to work.

Westminster model: A form of government in which there is a 'fusion' of power between the executive and the legislature, meaning that government decision-making is concentrated within a single body (in the UK, Parliament) (see p. 19).

Whips: MPs or peers whose role is to maintain party unity in Parliament by enforcing discipline and acting as a line of communications between frontbenchers and backbenchers; each party appoints a chief whip.

White Paper: A statement of policy by the government outlined in terms of legislative proposals.