

it is weakened by the growing power of the core executive, the subordination of the UK parliament to the ultimate authority of the EU, and the reluctance of parliament to exercise its ultimate power to remove a prime minister by a vote of no confidence (to be discussed in Section 4). The second principle of Britain as a unitary state is strained by transfer of some powers to legislative and administrative bodies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The third principle of fusion of powers at the national level requires the effective exercise of collective responsibility of the cabinet as a check on prime ministerial power. This principle has been compromised when powerful prime ministers—such as Thatcher and Blair—find ways to work around the cabinet. As the policy-making process remained focused on Whitehall, we see a consistent picture of growing concentration of power in the executive.

SECTION 4

REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

Focus Question

Is Parliament still as sovereign in practice as it remains in constitutional tradition?

What are the political—and what are the constitutional—implications of the Conservative–Liberal coalition government?

Will the center hold?

As discussed in Section 3, parliamentary sovereignty is the core constitutional principle defining the role of the legislature and, in a sense, the whole system of British government. The executive or judiciary can set no act of Parliament aside, nor is any Parliament bound by the actions of any previous Parliament. Nevertheless, in practice, the control exerted by the House of Commons (or Commons)—the lower of the two houses of Parliament and by far the more powerful—is not unlimited. This section investigates the powers and role of Parliament, both Commons and Lords. It also looks at the party system, elections, and contemporary currents in British political culture, citizenship, and identity. We close by offering an analysis of surprising new directions in political participation and social protest.

The Legislature

Today, the Commons does not really legislate in a meaningful way. Its real function is to assent to government legislation, since (with rare exceptions such as the present coalition government) a single governing party has a majority of the seats and can control the legislative agenda and pass legislation at will. In addition, the balance of effective oversight of policy has shifted from the legislature to executive agencies.

The House of Commons

The House of Commons, the lower house of Parliament, with 650 seats at the time of the 2010 election, exercises the main legislative power in Britain. Along with the two unelected elements of Parliament, the Crown and the House of Lords, the Commons has three main functions: (1) to pass laws, (2) to provide finances for the state by authorizing taxation, and (3) to review and scrutinize public administration and government policy.

In practical terms, the Commons has a limited legislative function. Nevertheless, it serves a very important democratic role. It provides a highly visible arena for policy debate and the partisan collision of political worldviews. The flash of rhetorical skills

brings drama to Westminster. One crucial element of drama, however, is nearly always missing. The outcome is seldom in doubt. MPs from the governing party (or as now, members of the Conservative–Liberal coalition) who consider rebelling against the leader of their respective parties or challenge the terms of the coalition agreement are understandably reluctant in a close and critical vote to force a general election. This would place their jobs in jeopardy. Only once since the defeat of Ramsay MacDonald's government in 1924 has a government been brought down by a defeat in the Commons (in 1979). Today, the balance of institutional power has shifted from Parliament to the governing party (or at present parties backing the coalition) and the executive.

The Legislative Process

Bills must be introduced in the Commons and the Lords, although approval by the Lords is not required. Ideas for legislation come from political parties, pressure groups, think tanks, the prime minister's policy unit, or government departments. Proposed legislation, on behalf of the government, is then drafted by civil servants, circulated within Whitehall, approved by the cabinet, and then refined by the office of Parliamentary Counsel.

In the Commons the bill usually comes to the floor three times. The bill is formally *read* upon introduction, printed, distributed, debated in general terms, and after an interval, given a *second reading*, followed by a vote. The bill then undergoes detailed review by a standing committee reflecting the overall party balance. It then goes through a report stage during which new amendments may be introduced. In the *third reading*, the bill is considered in final form (and voted on) without debate.

A bill passed in the Commons follows a parallel path in the Lords. There the bill is either accepted without change, amended, or rejected. The Lords passes bills concerning taxation or budgetary matters without alteration, but can add technical and editorial amendments to other bills (if approved by the Commons) to add clarity and precision. Finally, it receives royal assent (which is only a formality) and becomes an Act of Parliament.

The House of Lords

Traditionally the House of Lords (or Lords) was a wholly unelected body that was comprised of hereditary peers (nobility of the rank of duke, marquis, earl, viscount, or baron), and life peers (appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister or the recently institutionalized House of Lords Appointment Commission). The Lords also includes the archbishops of Canterbury and York and some two-dozen other bishops and archbishops of the Church of England. As part of a gradual reform agenda, in 1999, the right of all hereditary peers to sit and vote in the Lords was curtailed, and that right limited to 92 elected members. In 2011 the Lords had about 740 members.

Most significantly, the Lords serves mainly as a chamber of revision, providing expertise in redrafting legislation, with the power to suggest amendments to legislation under consideration in the Commons. The Lords can debate, refine, and delay—but not block—legislation. For example, in 2006, to protect the civil liberties of British Muslims the Lords persuaded the Commons to water down a bill that prohibited incitement to violence, on the grounds that the bill might unfairly be used to target Muslim clerics.

Reforms in Behavior and Structure

There have been a number of contemporary changes in the House. How significant are they? How far will they go to stem the tide in Parliament's much-heralded decline?

Behavioral Changes: Backbench Dissent Since the 1970s, backbenchers (MPs of the governing party who have no governmental office and rank-and-file opposition members) have been markedly less deferential. A backbench rebellion against the Major government's EU policy in 1993, which was viewed by Thatcherites as dangerously pro-European weakened the prime minister considerably and divided the party. One-third of Labour MPs defected on key votes authorizing the use of force in Iraq in 2003—an historic rebellion.

Structural Changes: Parliamentary Committees In addition to the standing committees that routinely review bills, in 1979 the Commons extended the number and responsibilities of select committees, which help Parliament exert control over the executive by examining specific policies or aspects of administration.

The most controversial select committees monitor the major departments and ministries. Select committees hold hearings, take written and oral testimony, and question senior civil servants and ministers. Their reports have included strong policy recommendations at odds with government policy. These reforms have complicated the role of the civil service. Civil servants have been required to testify in a manner that may damage their ministers, revealing official culpability or flawed judgments.

Political Parties and the Party System

Britain is often referred to as a two-party system, but as the 2010 election makes clear, that is a misnomer. It is true that from 1945 until the 2010 election, only leaders of the Labour or Conservative parties had served as prime ministers. And Conservative and Labour have been very closely matched. From 1945 through 2005, the Conservative and Labour parties each won eight general elections. In addition, throughout the postwar period, these two parties have routinely divided at least 85 percent of the seats in the Commons. But since the 1980s the Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) have become an important alternative. Britain also has several national parties: the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland and the Plaid Cymru in Wales as well as a roster of parties competing in Northern Ireland. (These parties are described below under "Trends in Electoral Behavior.")

The Labour Party

Fifty years ago, those not engaged in manual labor voted Conservative three times more commonly than they did Labour. More than two out of three manual workers, by contrast, voted Labour. Britain then conformed to one classic pattern of a Western European party system: a two-class/two-party system.

Since the mid-1970s significant changes have developed in the party system, for example, the decline in class-based voting. It has also seen growing disaffection with even the moderate social democracy associated with the Keynesian welfare state and Labourism. The Labour party suffered from divisions between its trade unionist and parliamentary elements, constitutional wrangling over the power of trade unions to determine party policy at annual conferences, and disputes over how the leader would be selected. Divisions spilled over into foreign policy issues.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed relative harmony within the party. Moderate trade union and parliamentary leadership agreed on major policy issues. Labour became a moderate center-left party. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, Labour was rebranded as “New Labour,” although its formal name remained the Labour Party. After the party’s defeat in the 2010 election, two close-knit brothers who had served in the cabinet, David Miliband with close ties to Blair as foreign minister, and Ed Miliband with close ties to Brown and former Secretary of State for Climate Change, were the top contenders to succeed Gordon Brown. In a dramatic contest for leadership of the Labour party in September 2010, Ed Miliband, the younger brother, prevailed in a very close election, signalling a turn away from New Labour and an effort to turn the party in a more progressive direction, without returning to “Old Labour.” Miliband has successfully rallied the base, particularly among trade unionists and public sector employees who are feeling the pinch the hardest under the austerity policies of the Coalition government.

The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party dates back to the eighteenth century. Its pragmatism, flexibility, and organizational capabilities have made it one of the most successful and, at times, innovative center-right parties in Europe.

In 2003, the combative and experienced Michael Howard took over as party leader. For a time, the Conservatives seemed revitalized. But it was not easy for Howard to translate his assured performances from the front bench in Parliament into popular support, as effective opposition to New Labour proved elusive. In fact, Conservatives made far less trouble for Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair on Iraq than did members of the Labour Party. Despite an energetic campaign in 2005, one likely to be remembered for the Conservatives’ playing of the race and ethnicity card, electoral defeat led to his quick resignation. In December 2005, the Conservatives elected David Cameron as party leader in a landslide.

Cameron wasted little time in reorienting the party, modernizing its appeal, and reaching out beyond its traditional core values. He acknowledged that New Labour had been right in understanding the mood of Britain and right, also, to insist on achieving both social justice and economic success. Cameron promised to reduce poverty both in Britain and globally, take on climate change as a priority, and ensure security from terrorism. A testament to Blair’s success, Cameron worked hard to reposition the Conservatives as a reforming more centrist party that could compete effectively with post-Blair New Labour across the economic and social spectrum.

Liberal Democrats

Through the 1970s, the Liberal Party was the only centrist challenger to the Labour and Conservative parties. Since the 1980s, a changing roster of centrist parties posed an increasingly significant threat to the two-party dominance of Conservative and Labour. In 1981, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) formed out of a split within the Labour Party. After the Conservative victory in 1987, the Liberal Party and most of the SDP merged to form the Social and Liberal Democratic Party (now called the Liberal Democrats or Lib Dems), which quickly emerged as a major political player.

In the 2001 general election the party increased its vote tally by nearly one-fifth and won fifty-two seats, the most since 1929. This success positioned the party as a

potentially powerful center-left critic of New Labour. That said, at least until Blair's fortunes declined, Labour did not make it easy for them. As the Blair government began to spend massively to improve education and health care—an approach that would come to haunt them later—it narrowed the range of policy issues on which the Liberal Democrats could challenge New Labour. Party leader Charles Kennedy won the political gamble in spring 2003 by opposing the war in Iraq. But it was not easy to take electoral advantage of Blair's political weakness. For a time, the fortunes of the Liberal Dems declined. In December 2007, after two leadership turnovers, Nick Clegg, a 40-year old ex-journalist and former member of the European Parliament took over leadership of the Liberal Democrats. Clegg and his party faced an uphill battle to make the Lib Dems a serious contender in time for the 2010 election. But the country's fatigue with New Labour, post-9/11 and post-7/7 concerns about the erosion of civil liberties that played to the party's strength, and Clegg's energetic and confident leadership—in fall 2008 Clegg launched a campaign to knock on one million doors to connect with ordinary citizens—quickly catapulted the Liberal Democrats into serious contention.

Elections

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British general elections are exclusively for seats in the House of Commons. The prime minister is not directly elected as prime minister but as a member of Parliament (MP) from a single constituency (electoral district). The Queen invites the leader of the party that can control a majority in the Commons to become prime minister. Constituencies vary widely in size, but the average number of voters remain roughly comparable. (In the 2010 election, the average number of voters in each constituency was roughly 68,000.)

Traditionally, Parliament had a maximum life of five years, with no fixed term. The 2010 coalition agreement proposed a fixed term of five years subject to dissolution by a 55 percent vote of members of parliament (MPs).

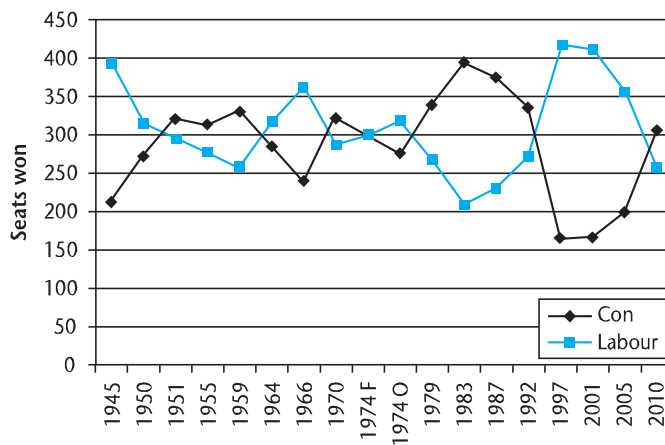


FIGURE 2.6 Comparison of Number of Seats Won by Conservative versus Labour in UK General Elections from 1945 to 2010

Source: House of Commons Research papers 08/12, 10/36. <http://www.ukpolitical/ConvLab.htm>.

The Electoral System and the 2010 Election

Election for representatives in the Commons (members of Parliament, or MPs) is by a “first-past-the-post” principle in each constituency. In this single-member plurality system, the candidate who receives the most votes is elected. There is no requirement of a majority and no element of proportional representation (a system in which each party is given a percentage of seats in a representative assembly roughly comparable to its percentage of the popular vote).

This winner-take-all electoral system tends to exaggerate the size of the victory of the largest party and to reduce the influence of regionally dispersed lesser parties. This system is praised for increasing the chances that a party or coalition of parties will gain a majority of parliamentary seats and therefore form a stable government.

Critics of the electoral system charge that it does not give adequate representation to minority opinion.

Contrary to the typical tendency of the winner-take-all electoral system, the 2010 election resulted in a **hung parliament** (a situation after an election when no single party comprises a majority in the Commons). Only after a quick set of negotiations, could an arrangement be found to form a coalition government. Thus 2010 is one for the record books. On the one hand, it was the exception that proves the rule. Ordinarily Britain exhibits a stable two-party-dominant system (Conservative and Labour), with support for a third party (Liberal Democrat) spread widely across the country, but spread too thinly for the party to win a substantial number of seats. The Liberal Democrats needed an exceptional stroke of luck to buck the trend—and they got it in 2010. The campaign by the Tories peaked early, failed to inspire, and could not convince the electorate that they had the experience or were equipped to handle the enormous challenges of the economic downturn. With Blair fatigue, an unpopular successor in Gordon Brown, and a failing economy, New Labour never really stood a chance to win the election outright. The first televised debates ever in UK politics certainly enlivened the campaign. They also initially fueled a surge in popularity for the telegenic and media savvy Lib-Dem leader, Nick Clegg, who stole the show in the first debate. In fact, for a time, “Cleggmania” produced polls showing the Lib Dems with an unprecedented one-third of the electorate behind them. For a brief moment, Britain enjoyed the unlikely spectacle of a three-party contest, but one in which Labour never really had a chance.

With a two-party dominant party system, the UK electoral system tends to produce a stable single-party government. That observation seems less certain now than it did before 2010, but it will take more than one hung parliament to make observers think that the UK party system has been fundamentally transformed.

It is not clear whether the 2010 election returns signal the beginning of a critical realignment in the electoral system, but most observers recognize some grounds for improvement. For a start, the electoral system raises questions about representation and fairness. Like other winner-take-all systems, a close second place in a constituency (as in a U.S. electoral district) is simply a loss. The system reduces the competitiveness of smaller parties, like the Lib Dems, with diffuse pockets of support across the country.

In 2010 the Liberal Democrats with 23 percent of the vote won 57 seats. Labour with 29 percent of the vote won 258 seats. The Conservatives with 36.1 percent of the vote won 306 seats. Thus the Liberal Democrats achieved a share of the vote that was roughly two-thirds that of the Conservatives, but won roughly one-fifth of the seats won by the Tories. Such are the benefits of an electoral system to the victor (as well as the second major party).

Is there any wonder why more than anything else the Liberal Democrats want what neither major party would give them: A change in the electoral system to proportional representation (PR), where the number of seats allocated to parties in parliament would closely approximate the proportion of votes cast for a given party? PR would be a game changer, catapulting the Lib Dems into major party status and making them a potential kingmaker, tipping the balance in many close general elections to either the Conservatives or Labour. For that very reason, it is unlikely that such a fundamental change in the electoral system will be introduced any time soon. But parliamentary sovereignty means that any time there is a political will to change the electoral system, the electoral system can be changed by parliament.

PR seems very unlikely, but serious consideration is being given to a system called “The Alternative Vote” (AV), in which voters rank preferences among candidates. If no candidate receives a majority of first-preference votes, then second-preference

hung parliament

A situation after an election when no single party comprises a majority in the Commons.

votes of the candidate who finished last are redistributed, and the process is continued until a candidate achieves a majority. In fact, The Coalition Agreement calls for a Referendum Bill on electoral reform, which would introduce the Alternative Vote. It should come as no surprise, however, that the coalition partners are deeply divided on the system for electing MPs.

Gender, Ethnicity, and Representation

The party and electoral systems contribute to the creation of a Parliament that has been and remains a bastion of white men, but it is becoming more diverse. The 2010 election produced a record number of ethnic minority MPs, with 27 elected, nearly double the number in 2005. Moreover there were a set of firsts: Labour's first Muslim female MP and first African MP; and for the Conservatives, their first Asian woman MP. Also a record percentage of women were elected in 2010 (21.5 percent, up from 19.8 percent in 2005). But this increase is hardly a surge, and in comparative terms the UK has a long way to go when it comes to women's representation: It ranks 73rd in the world in female representation. Despite the general trend of increased representation of women and minorities, they remain substantially underrepresented in Parliament.

Trends in Electoral Behavior

Recent general elections have deepened geographic and regional fragmentation. British political scientist Ivor Crewe has referred to the emergence of two two-party systems: (1) Competition between the Conservative and Labour parties dominates contests in English urban and northern seats, and (2) Conservative-center party competition dominates England's rural and southern seats. A third two-party competition has emerged in Scotland, where Labour competes with the Scottish National Party.⁹

The national (that is regional) parties have challenged two-party dominance since the 1970s, but with only limited results. The Scottish National Party (SNP) was founded in 1934 and its Welsh counterpart, the Plaid Cymru, in 1925. The 2010 election showed the strength of Labour in Scotland, where it won 41 seats and 42 percent of the Scottish popular vote, an improvement over 2005. The Lib Dems came in a distant second with 11 seats, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won six seats. The election demonstrated once more that the Conservatives have very little traction in Scotland. They walked away with a single seat. In Wales, the Conservatives fared better, gaining five more seats than they had won in 2005 for a total of eight seats at Westminster. The Plaid Cymru won three seats, one more than in 2005. Although Labour lost four seats compared to 2005, they walked away with a very strong showing, winning 26 out of 40 seats. The results for Scotland and Wales likely indicate that devolution has weakened nationalist fervour.

Political Culture, Citizenship, and Identity

In their study of the ideals and values that shape political behavior, political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba wrote that the civic (or political) culture in Britain was characterized by trust, deference to authority, and pragmatism.¹⁰ But the 1970s became a crucial turning point in British political culture and group identities that challenged this view.

During the 1970s, the long years of economic decline culminated in economic reversals in the standard of living for many Britons. Also for many, the historic bonds of occupational and social class grew weaker. Both union membership and popularity declined. At the same time, a growing number of conservative think tanks and mass-circulation newspapers worked hard to erode support for the welfare state. New social movements such as feminism, antinuclear activism, and environmentalism, challenged basic tenets of British political culture. Identities based on race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation gained significance. These trends fragmented the political map and inspired a shift to the right.

Thatcher's ascent reflected these changes in political culture, identities, and values. Thatcherism rejected collectivism, the redistribution of resources from rich to poor, and state responsibility for full employment. It considered individual property rights more important than the social rights claimed by all citizens in the welfare state. Thatcherism set the stage in cultural terms for the new Labour consolidation of neoliberalism and the core political-cultural orientation in Britain.

Social Class

A key change in political culture in the last quarter-century has been the weakening of bonds grounded in the experience of labor. During the Thatcher era, the traditional values of "an honest day's work for an honest day's pay" and solidarity among co-workers in industrial disputes were labelled "rigidities" that reduced productivity and competitiveness. New Labour continued to characterize social class as an impediment to competitiveness.

Being "tough on the unions" was a core premise of New Labour and a view that the Conservative-led coalition government has powerfully reinforced. Particularly in the context of the government's aggressive cuts in public spending, it looks like very tough days ahead for unions, particularly public sector unions, which have become a lightning rod, not only in the UK, but in the United States as well, for governments looking to cut budgets—and blame somebody for the need to make cuts. This process has contributed to a fundamental erosion of the ability of working people to improve their lot through collective bargaining or to exert influence over public policy through the political muscle of the trade union movement. Class still matters, but not in the dominating way that it shaped the nineteenth century or the collectivist era. Fewer workers belong to unions, and unions focus narrowly on enforcing individual legal rights in the workplace. Collective bargaining has been largely relegated to declining private sector industries and the public sector.¹¹ Strike rates in the UK have generally been below the average of both the OECD and the EU in recent decades, but intense opposition to the cuts introduced by the coalition government seems likely to reverse that trend with a vengeance.

National Identity

Decolonization has created a multiethnic Britain. National identity has become especially complicated. Questions about fragmented sovereignty within the context of the EU, the commingled histories of four nations (England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland/Northern Ireland), and the interplay of race and nationality have created doubts about British identity that run deep. Ethnicity, intra-UK territorial attachments, Europeanization, and globalization are complicating national identity. Can Britain foster a more inclusive sense of British identity?

Nearly 8 percent of the people who live in Britain are of African, African-Caribbean, or Asian descent. The authors of a landmark study of multiethnic Britain

explained: “Many communities overlap; all affect and are affected by others. More and more people have multiple identities—they are Welsh Europeans, Pakistani Yorkshirewomen, Glaswegian Muslims, English Jews, and black British. Many enjoy this complexity but also experience conflicting loyalties.”¹²

Despite many success stories, ethnic minority communities have experienced police insensitivity, problems in access to the best public housing, hate crimes, and accusations that they are not truly British if they do not root for the English cricket team. In addition, harsh criticism is directed at immigrants and asylum seekers. Since this criticism comes in the wake of intense scrutiny of the Muslim community after 9/11 and 7/7, it contributes to the alienation of the ethnic minority community, particularly among some groups of Muslim citizens. Ordinary law-abiding Muslims have experienced intensified mistrust and intimidation. But it is also true that Muslim university graduates are assuming leading roles in the professions and that dozens of Muslim city councillors have been elected across the country.

Interests, Social Movements, and Protests

In recent years, partly in response to globalization, political protest has been on the rise. Protesters demand more accountability and transparency in the operations of powerful international trade and development agencies. For example, in 1999 London became the site of protests timed to correspond with the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The London demonstration generated some 100,000 protesters.

The intensity of environmental activism has taken off with the growing attention to genetically modified (GM) crops in the late 1990s. In November 1999, the government announced a ban on commercially grown GM crops in Britain.

A quite different kind of activism spread to the countryside among a population not usually known for political protest. Farmers had been badly hurt by the “mad cow disease” crisis in 1996 and saw an urban bias at play in New Labour and the growing threat to fox hunting. They launched massive protests, and, even after a law banning the hunt went into effect in 2005, they kept up the heat with legal challenges.

A series of antiwar rallies were held in London before the UK and the United States launched the Iraq war. In September 2002, a huge protest rally was organized in London, led by the Stop the War Coalition and the Muslim Association of Britain. Both within the United Kingdom and among observers of British politics and society, many still endorse the view that British culture is characterized by pragmatism, trust, and deference to authority. This may be true, but the persistence of a wide range of protest movements, including reverberating protests in 2011 against the very significant cuts introduced by the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government qualifies this story. As the opening vignette for this chapter reveals on any given day the British are even capable of out-protesting the French!

Summary

When we look at representation and participation in Britain we see very clearly that there is much flux, uncertainty, and room for improvement. In institutional terms the declining sovereignty of parliament leaves open the prospect of excessive power in the cabinet and the office of the prime minister.

It is not easy for Britons across national, ethnic, gender, and class distinctions to preserve a sense of shared fates and common heritage. The divisions are reflected in

the upsurge of protests across the political spectrum. Things are more unsettled in Britain than people have come to expect. People in the UK are experiencing a rare level of uncertainty which has been acutely focused by a severe erosion in its economic fortunes and which coincides with what for Britain must be considered unusual political and constitutional volatility.

BRITISH POLITICS IN TRANSITION

5 SECTION

On July 7, 2005, four British suicide bombers, all Muslims, detonated a set of coordinated attacks on the London transport system during morning rush hour. Three bombs went off in quick succession on the London underground (subway) and one, an hour later, on a double-decker bus nearby. Fifty-six people were killed including the al-Qaeda-linked suicide bombers, and some 700 people were injured. The mayor and most inhabitants of the city, often invoking imagery of stoic Londoners withstanding the German blitz during World War II, remained calm and determined in the face of these devastating attacks. They insisted that London would remain an open and cosmopolitan city as it had been for centuries. And then the other shoe dropped.

Focus Questions

- Can Britain resolve the tension over national identity?
- Will the center hold?
- How well is Britain's ancient political system adjusting to contemporary challenges?

Two weeks after 7/7, an entirely innocent Brazilian electrician, unconnected to the bombings, was shot dead by police who were under enormous pressure to prevent further attacks and mistakenly considered him responsible for the suicide attacks. The victim was travelling from his apartment to a job in Northwest London when he was killed. He was chased into a London subway station by roughly twenty police officers, where he was cornered, tripped, and shot seven times in the head and once in the shoulder. He was wearing a thick coat that, in the jittery aftermath of 7/7, raised suspicions that he might be hiding a suicide belt. He ran from the police when ordered to stop. A Brazilian could be mistaken for a person of Pakistani or Jamaican or Middle Eastern descent, as were the 7/7 bombers. Coming on the heels of 7/7, this tragic accident underscores how tense everyone is about security from terror attack and how race and ethnicity probably blinded even well-trained police officers into making an awful mistake.



Alessandro Abbonzio/AFP/Getty Images

The murder of an innocent Brazilian electrician by police officers shortly after 7/7 raised new and troubling questions about security and about ethnic and racial tension in Britain.