

# Great Britain: Governance and Policymaking Institutions

## I. Constitution

A. Sources

B. Key Principles

C. Reform

## II. Policymaking Institutions

A. Parliament

(Commons and Lords)

B. Executive

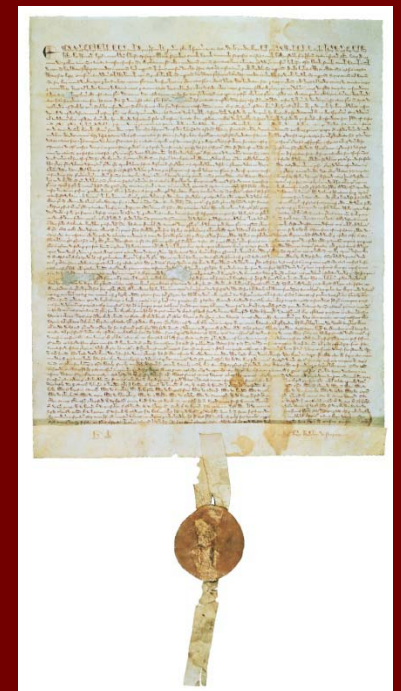
(PM, Cabinet, and Civil Service)



# I. The British Constitution

- Misnomer: “Britain does not have a constitution”
- No single, written document as in US
- Historic constitution that has evolved over centuries
- Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, Reform Acts, Parliament Act [limiting power of Lords], etc.

Original copy of the Magna Carta



# A. Sources of the Constitution

- **Statute Law: Acts of Parliament**
- **Common Law (Legal precedents)**
  - **Prerogative Powers:** Powers in principle reserved to the Crown, but exercised by appointed ministers.
- **Convention**
  - EX: Vote of 'No Confidence'
- **European Union  
Laws and Treaties**



Royal Mace – Physical Symbol  
Of 'Crown in Parliament'

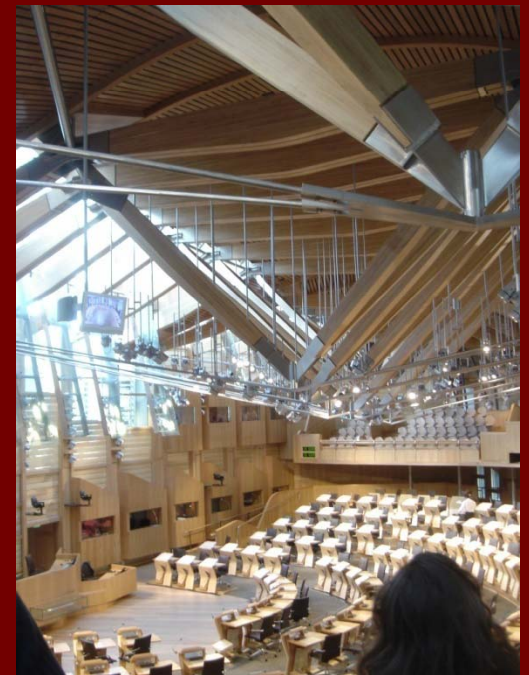
## B. Key Principles of the Constitution

- **Constitutional Monarchy**
- **Parliamentary Sovereignty**
- **Rule of Law**
- **Democratic Accountability**
- **Unitary State**
- **Membership in the EU**

# C. Constitutional Reform

- **Electoral Reform**
- **Reform of the House of Lords**
- **European Union (Single Currency)**
  - Defeat of EU Constitution
  - Brown's Hostility
- **Devolution**

Chamber of the  
Scottish Parliament



# Devolution

- "A State of Unions"
- Parliament for Scotland
- National Assembly for Wales
- Northern Ireland Assembly (power-sharing)
- Government & Mayor for London
- Regional Governments in England?
  - The 'West Lothian Question'



# II. Policymaking Institutions

## A. 'Parliament': House of Commons & House of Lords



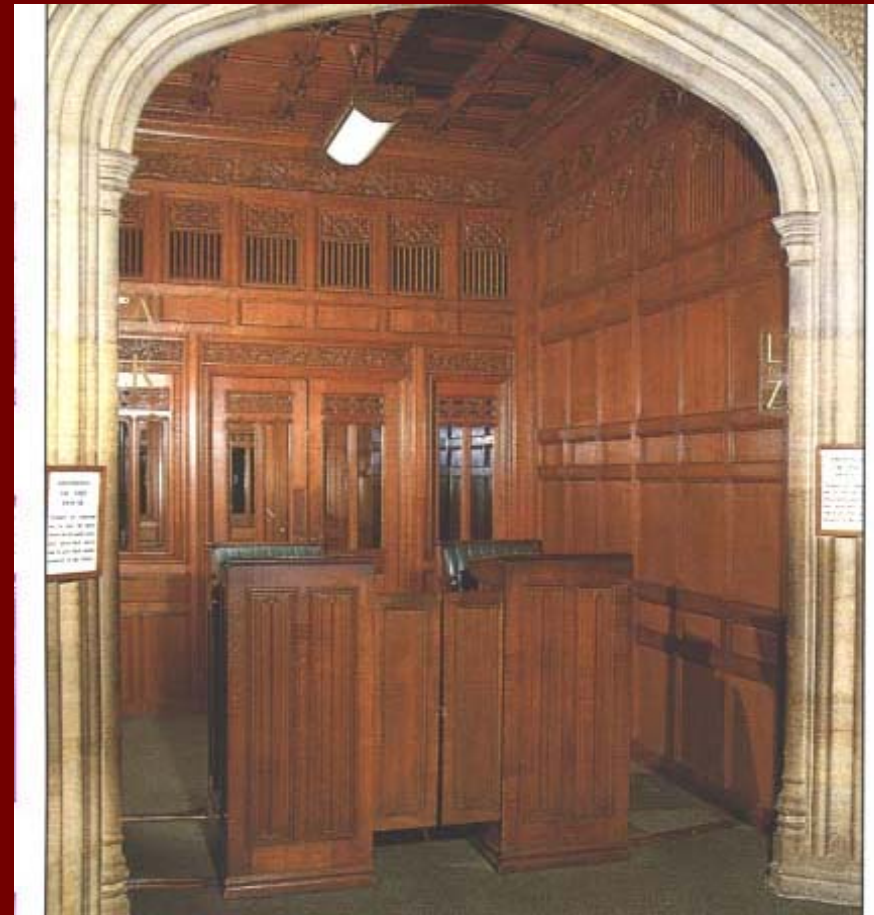
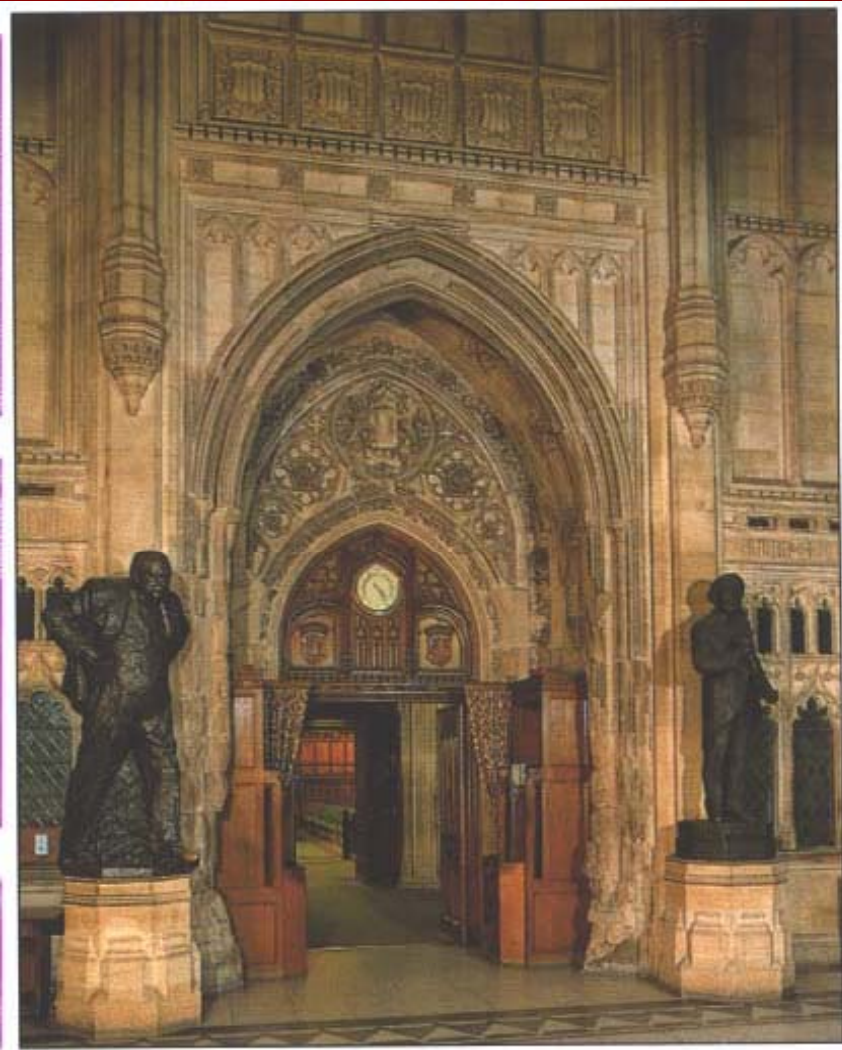
# House of Commons

- Superior to Lords
- 646 members (MPs), individual districts
- Only political career path in UK
- Fairly strict party discipline; generally vote with party
- Reactive body

# House of Commons Chamber



# Entrance and Division Lobbies



# Role of House of Commons

- Provide Members of the Government
- Approve Legislation
  - Standing Committees
- Debate
- Scrutiny/Oversight
  - Question Time(s)
  - Select Committees
- Role of 'Backbenchers'



# House of Lords

- Originally body of Lords Temporal (Hereditary Peers) and Lords Spiritual (Bishops of Anglican Church)
- Life Peers (e.g., Lady Margaret Thatcher)
- Labour (1999) stripped hereditary peers of voting power
  - except 75 plus 15 “office holders” (i.e., Deputy Speakers) and 2 “Royal Appointments” (92 total)
- Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949
- Revising Chamber

# House of Lords Chamber

Party	Total
Conservative	202
Labour	217
Liberal Democrat	78
Crossbench	198
Bishops	26
Other**	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>736</b>

Distribution of Lords by Party (December 2007)



## B. The British Executive

- 'Executive': PM, Cabinet, and Civil Service
- Powers of the Prime Minister
  - Party Leader
  - Appoints and Leads Cabinet (Head of Government)
  - Appoints Top Civil Service/Foreign Service Officers
  - Calls General Elections (at least every 5 years)
  - Patronage (e.g., Peerages; Agency Appointments)
- 'Elected Dictatorship'
- Limitations on PM Powers
- H.H. Asquith: *"The office of the Prime Minister is what the holder chooses and is able to make of it."*

# UK Cabinet System

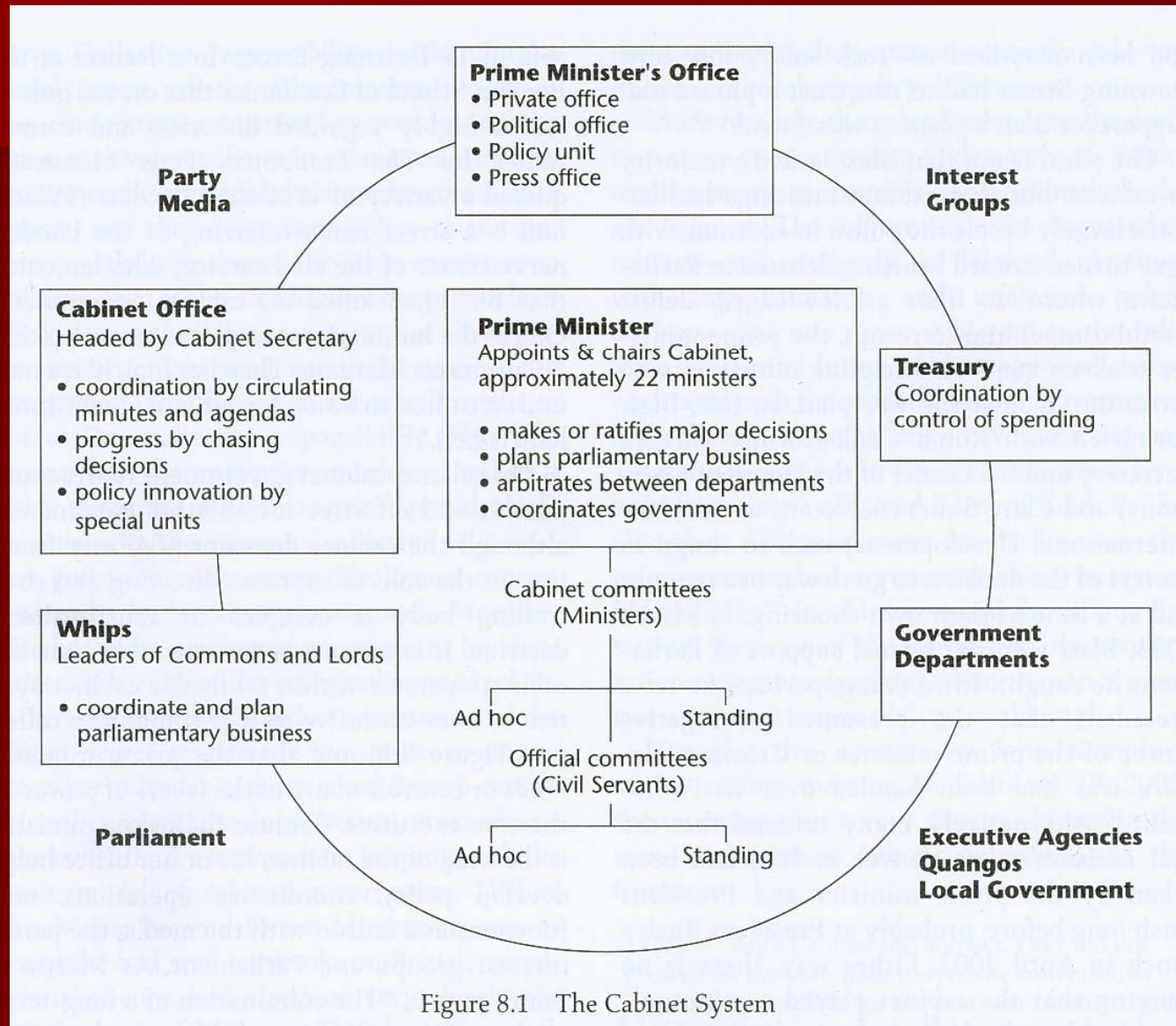


Figure 8.1 The Cabinet System

# 10 Downing Street

- The Prime Minister's Residence



Blair goes out,  
Brown comes in...

...you don't get close.



# Cabinet

- 'Cabinet': Ministers of State (heads of departments), leaders in the Commons, some Lords (e.g., Lord Chancellor)
- Full Cabinet and Cabinet Committees
- Principles Guiding Cabinet:
  - Collective Responsibility
  - Secrecy
- Ministers and Ministerial Responsibility



All smiles  
for now...

# Civil Service

- 'Permanent Secretary': Civil Service chief of the department alongside (but subordinate to) the Minister of State
- Three Principles Guide Civil Service
  - Permanency
  - Neutrality
  - Ministerial Responsibility

Sir Humphrey Appleby gives advice in the BBC's *Yes, Minister*

