

The background features several large, overlapping, hand-drawn style swirls in light green, light blue, and light purple. Scattered throughout the scene are numerous small, yellow, triangular shapes, some pointing upwards and others downwards, resembling confetti or stylized sun rays.

British Political Parties

A look at the landscape



Impact on Constitution

- Crucial to British Constitution
- Provide links between
 - Parliament and executive
 - Citizens and government
- In Walter Bagehot's terms, the "buckle" in the system
- Transformative role:
 - Transfer power of parliament to cabinet



The British Party System

A two or 'few' party system

- Up to a dozen parties contesting elections
- However, only three major parties
 - Labour or 'New Labour'
 - Liberal Democrats
 - Conservatives
- Labour or Conservatives normally have majority
- Others potentially important because they can draw support away from the majors



The Labour Party:

- Established by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 1900
- Becomes a Socialist Party in 1918:
 - Commitment to public ownership of the means of production
- Strong trade union presence within party
- Historically divided about how to achieve its objectives
- Labour v. New Labour?



The Conservatives

- 18th c roots
- a mass party, from 1869
- Historic principle: Willingness to adapt, accept some change, in order to preserve the best of the past
- As such, has assumed a variety of different positions:
 - Acceptance of free trade
 - Empire Preference
 - Post WW II
 - Acceptance of welfare state
 - One Nation Conservatism
- Thatcherism & beyond?



Liberal Democrats:

- Liberals
 - 18 & 19th c roots
 - 19th c & early 20th c
 - force for political & social reform
 - Splits:
 - Home Rule
 - (20th c) reform agenda
 - Eclipsed by Labour in the interwar period
- Resurgence after 1970
 - Merger with Social Democrats (mid-80s)
 - Remains 3rd party in two party duopoly

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide features a light green balloon at the top, a light blue balloon in the middle, and a light purple balloon at the bottom. Yellow streamers and triangular flags are scattered around the balloons.

Other parties:

- Scottish National Party (SNP)
- British National Party (BNP)
- Unionists
- Social Democratic and Labour Party
- UKIP – United Kingdom Independence Party



What parties divide over

- 19th c
 - Liberals vs. Conservatives
 - Religion
 - Pace of reform
- 20th c
 - Social class
 - The welfare state
- Today?



20th C Party Battle

- Until 1911
 - Liberals v. Conservatives, with Liberals as majority party
- Interwar period:
 - 3 party competition
 - Occasional Conservative majorities
 - Labour minority govts
 - 1924-26
 - 1929-31
 - National Coalitions
 - 1931-39
 - 1939-45



From 1945

- 1945 Labour wins majority
 - Builds welfare state
- 1951-64 Conservatives in power
 - Accept & expand welfare state
 - 'Butskellism'
- 1964-70 Labour back in power



From 1970

- End of postwar consensus
 - Decline of older industries
 - Increased tensions, strikes
 - Conservatives move to the right
 - Labour to the left
- Party balance
 - 1970-74 Conservative under Edward Heath
 - 1974-79 Labour w. bare majority, then minority
 - Harold Wilson (until 1976)
- Conservative hegemony 1979-97
 - Margaret Thatcher, 1979-1990
 - John Major 1990-97
 - James Callaghan (1976-79)



From 1979

- From 1997 'New Labour'
 - Tony Blair (until 2007)
 - Gordon Brown (from 2007)



Problems:

Thatcherism

- What was it?
- How did it come about?
- What did it accomplish?
- Labour v. New Labour?
 - What did it take to come back to power?