



THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN ENGLANDⁱ

Eugenia Bazaniⁱⁱ

Director,
13th Primary School of Chalandri,
Greece

Abstract:

One of the key features of pluralist democracy is the existence of political parties. The political party, as a means of acquiring and exercising power, is essentially linked to a specific historical moment in Western democracy and to one country in particular: Great Britain. The political system and political institutions of Great Britain are governed neither by a constitution in the strict sense, nor even, for the most part, by legal rules, but by practical political customs, the so-called “conventions of the political system.” Based on these, through a gradual, slow, and continuous adaptation of outdated institutions— which, while retaining their traditional outward form, have changed in substance— political power is concentrated at the level of the Government. Today, the Government essentially exercises both the powers of the monarch and those of the House of Commons. This is because the government and Parliament, through the majority party, form a political unity. In conclusion, we could say that in Great Britain, the compliance of those in power with the informal and non-coercive rules of the “constitutional conventions” is ultimately explained by the fact that there is broad public consent to the existing political system, which accepts and legitimizes the established political institutions and thus enables their smooth functioning.

Keywords: parliament, liberals, labour, conservatives, two-party system

Περίληψη:

Ένα από τα βασικά γνωρίσματα της πλουραλιστικής δημοκρατίας είναι η ύπαρξη πολιτικών κομμάτων. Το πολιτικό κόμμα ως μέσο κατάκτησης και διαχείρισης της εξουσίας συνδέεται ουσιαστικά με μια ιστορική στιγμή της δυτικής δημοκρατίας και με μία χώρα τη Μεγάλη Βρετανία. Το πολίτευμα και οι πολιτικοί θεσμοί της Μεγάλης Βρετανίας δεν διέπονται ούτε από Σύνταγμα κατά κυριολεξία, ούτε καν, κατά μεγάλο μέρος, από νομικούς κανόνες, αλλά από πρακτικές πολιτικές συνήθειες, τις λεγόμενες «συνθήκες του πολιτεύματος». Βάσει αυτών, με μια βαθμιαία, αργή και συνεχή προσαρμογή απαρχαιωμένων θεσμών που διατηρώντας την παραδοσιακή

ⁱ ΤΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟ ΣΥΣΤΗΜΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΓΓΛΙΑ

ⁱⁱ Correspondence: email mpazaneugenia@gmail.com

εξωτερική μορφή τους, έχουν αλλάξει περιεχόμενο, η πολιτική εξουσία βρίσκεται συγκεντρωμένη στο επίπεδο της Κυβέρνησης. Αυτή σήμερα ασκεί, ουσιαστικά, τόσο τις εξουσίες του μονάρχη, όσο και εκείνες της Βουλής των Κοινοτήτων. Τούτο συμβαίνει, διότι η Κυβέρνηση και το Κοινοβούλιο συνθέτουν, μέσω του πλειοψηφούντος κόμματος, μια πολιτική ενότητα. Συμπερασματικά, θα μπορούσαμε να πούμε, ότι στη μεγάλη Βρετανία, η συμμόρφωση των εκάστοτε κυβερνώντων προς τους άτυπους και μη εξαναγκαστικούς κανόνες των «συνθηκών του πολιτεύματος» εξηγείται σε τελική ανάλυση από το γεγονός, ότι υπάρχει η ευρεία συγκατάθεση του λαού στο ισχύον πολιτικό σύστημα, ο οποίος αποδέχεται και νομιμοποιεί τους κατεστημένους πολιτικούς θεσμούς και καθιστά έτσι εφικτή την ομαλή λειτουργία τους.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Κοινοβούλιο, Φιλελεύθεροι, Εργατικοί, Συντηρητικοί, δικομματισμός

1. Introduction

England, the birthplace of Great Britain, then the United Kingdom, and finally the British Empire, has shaped the course of human history over the past 500 years and is the cradle of political parties. It gave birth to fundamental constitutional arrangements and institutions of global application, such as the first concept of a Constitution (Lex Terrae), which, as "*the Law of the Land*," is established by society (Papagrigoriou, 2006).

One of the key features of pluralist democracy is the existence of political parties that compete for power within a framework of rules that ensure equal opportunity. The British political system is a rare phenomenon in the political history of Western Europe, based on two pillars: the two-party structure of the political spectrum and the first-past-the-post electoral system. The dominant parties, drawing on their strength in Parliament, maintain the majority system, whether they are the Liberals and Conservatives or the Conservatives and Labour. Despite its relative stability, the British political system is not static. As early as the 1990s, a decline in the importance of class in voters' choices was observed, while there were numerous reactions against the two-party system and the way it was enforced.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the various forms that the political system has taken and the influence that social political forces and electoral systems have had on these changes. It was not until the late 18th century that modern forms of political parties began to emerge in Great Britain, under conditions, of course, that called them into question. Although some, such as Burke (Meny, 1995:139), defended the principle of party organization, the idea was generally criticized on the grounds that "factions undermine the unity of the Monarchy and authority."

Το πολιτικό κόμμα ως μέσο κατάκτησης και διαχείρισης της εξουσίας συνδέεται ουσιαστικά με μια ιστορική στιγμή της δυτικής δημοκρατίας και με μία χώρα τη Μεγάλη Βρετανία. Από την άποψη αυτή, καθοριστικό είναι το

γεγονός, ότι η εξάπλωση του δημοκρατικού συστήματος, κατά κανόνα όπως αυτό διαμορφώθηκε στη Μεγάλη Βρετανία, συνοδεύεται από την πεποίθηση, ότι τα κόμματα είναι τα πλέον ενδεδειγμένα όργανα για τον πολιτικό αγώνα. Η ύπαρξη του κόμματος αποτελεί, κατά κάποιο τρόπο, συστατικό στοιχείο του πολιτικού καθεστώτος. Έτσι, η μεγάλη αύξηση του αριθμού των κρατών μετά το δεύτερο παγκόσμιο πόλεμο είχε σαν επακόλουθο τον πολλαπλασιασμό των κομματικών οργανώσεων.

2. The Evolution of the Political System since the 13th Century and Its General Characteristics

Great Britain, with Hobbes and Locke, was the first to embrace the political implications of the new principles that placed the individual at the foundation of social organization (Berstein, 2002:33). Indeed, since the 13th century, with the Magna Carta and the Oxford Provisions in England, there has been a parliament whose purpose is to oversee the actions of the royal authority, particularly regarding taxation. The English monarchy undoubtedly sought to establish absolute power.

During the 17th century, however, two successive revolutions led to the rejection of absolute monarchy and the adoption of institutions in line with Locke's ideas. The first English Revolution, which took place from 1640 to 1660, culminated in the dethronement and execution, in 1649, of King Charles I, following a long conflict between the monarch and Parliament. Parliament sought to compel the king to accept limitations on his authority regarding taxation, conscription, and religious matters.

The second English Revolution, in 1688, which the English called the Glorious Revolution, had the same root cause: the conflict between Parliament and the king over the contentious issue of religious freedom. In 1689, Parliament imposed a Bill of Rights on the king, precisely defining the limits of his authority. He was required to recognize the freedoms of the English people, particularly the individual liberty enshrined in a 1673 statute, the regular convening of Parliament for the purpose of enacting laws and levying taxes, and finally, religious tolerance for Protestants. Following this Declaration of Rights, during the 18th century, a gradual evolution toward a parliamentary and liberal monarchy took place.

The British party system can be divided into four periods: The first, from 1950 to 1970, is characterized by David Denver as a period of absolute bipartisanship, with the two parties monopolizing power and enjoying widespread support (David, 1994). The second period, 1970–1979, is notable for a decline in the momentum of the two major parties and an increase in support for the Liberals; many conclude that the traditional British two-party system was coming to an end. The main feature of the third period, 1983–1992, is the absolute dominance of the Tories, who win one election after another, first under Margaret Thatcher and then under her successor, John Major. Labour even lost the 1992 election, defying all the polls. Finally, the period 1997–2005 was marked by Labour's return to power for the first time since 1974, led by T. Blair. The consecutive

victories in 1997, 2001, and 2005 laid the groundwork for a Labour dominance comparable to that of Thatcher.

It took roughly a century—beginning with the establishment of parliamentarism and passing through the hands of the oligarchy—to arrive at political democracy, the very principle of which had long been rejected. The United Kingdom in the early 20th century, through a process of gradual progression that adapted institutions to the evolution of ideas and changes in social structures, transformed into a liberal democracy whose liberal principles, which it itself had given birth to, were progressively tempered by the introduction of political and social democracy.

3. The Two-party Nature of the Political System

Since the 19th century, the first-past-the-post electoral system—established through a series of People’s Acts—has become synonymous with British politics and has been almost universally accepted by the general public. It also constitutes an institutionalized tradition in a country where traditional legitimacy is important. The British system is a classic example of relative majority voting in single-member districts (D. Nohlen). The configuration of the electoral map, with its many single-member districts in England, has a significant impact on party strength: it favors those parties whose appeal is locally concentrated.

Another consequence of the system is that it reinforces the complementary effects of wasted votes and strategic voting. A wasted vote refers to votes cast for candidates who failed to get elected because of the system, while strategic voting is the phenomenon whereby a voter, feeling that if they vote for their first choice, their vote will be “wasted,” they strategically vote for their next-highest preference, which has some chance of winning. These results led Duverger to formulate the law that every majority system leads to a two-party system. The consolidation of a two-party system is the most significant political consequence of the winner-takes-all system, which after the war was artificial (Diamantopoulos, 1993).

The bipolar nature of the British two-party system has a number of consequences for the country’s political life. A key feature is that it forces the major parties to represent the interests of their voters to a lesser extent, since they must also win over supporters of other parties. This results in a shift in political discourse from ideological to more “material,” low-level political issues. Furthermore, large parties with a governing orientation tone down the sharpness of their opposition rhetoric. The electoral system and the two-party system are considered the main reasons why authoritarian political solutions did not take root in England. In a two-party system, voters identify more closely with the political system as a whole, as changes in government relieve political life of any sense of failure (Diamantopoulos, 2001).

However, the stability provided by the electoral system would be undermined if a third party were to reach 30%. Nevertheless, the two-party stability rests on shaky ground due to the artificial nature of the system and is reinforced more by the general consensus within British society regarding the importance of stability, even at the

expense of the popular mandate. Another characteristic of the British two-party system is that since the 1970s it has been dominated by one party, in contrast to the balanced two-party system of the 1950s and 1960s. In general, and despite the criticism it has faced, the British system has been minimally affected throughout the 20th century by the dramatic changes that occurred in the United Kingdom's environment.

The British two-party system is a complete or perfect two-party system (Diamantopoulos, 1993). This is because there has never been a coalition government between one of the two major parties, not even when the party system tended toward a three-party system, such as in the 1920s with the rise of the Labour Party. Furthermore, the British two-party system is also rigid, as the parliamentary groups of both parties exhibit uniformity and a substantial over-empowerment of the prime minister. The Constitution of the United Kingdom is defined as the body of laws that constitute the political system of the United Kingdom (Trueman, C, 2015). It concerns both the relationship between the individual and the state, as well as the functioning of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Unlike other states, England does not have a single constitutional document. Much of the British constitution is embodied in written documents, in the form of statutes, judicial decisions, acts of authority, and treaties. It has other unwritten sources, including parliamentary constitutional conventions. Another principle of the British constitution, as articulated by legal scholar Albert Venn Dicey, is the rule of law (Dicey, 1982).

The political system and political institutions of Great Britain are governed neither by a Constitution in the strict sense, nor even, for the most part, by legal rules, but by established political practices, the so-called "conventions of the political system." Based on these, through a gradual, slow, and continuous adaptation of outdated institutions—which, while retaining their traditional outward form, have changed in substance—political power is concentrated at the level of the Government. Today, the Government essentially exercises both the powers of the monarch and those of the House of Commons. This is because the Government and Parliament, through the majority party, form a political unity. Thus, the evolution of the parliamentary system has resulted in the concentration of all political power in the hands of the leadership of the majority party, which constitutes the Government, and particularly in the hands of its leader, who is the Prime Minister and heads not only the Government but also the House of Commons, where his party holds a majority.

The fact that the two parties mutually abide by the rules of the political "game" is due to the fact that their differences are quantitative rather than qualitative. It should be noted that, despite the breadth of the electorate, nearly two-thirds of the members of the House of Commons, regardless of party affiliation, come from the liberal professions and business circles, while only the remaining one-third are small merchants, artisans, laborers, etc.

This class composition of Parliament contributes to a situation where the relationships among its members—and especially between the leaderships of the two parties—are not so much those of adversaries as of "rival partners." Most importantly, political struggles in England do not concern the existing political-social system; they do

not challenge it; they are not waged for or against the system, but within it. Perhaps because those in power have room for concessions, compromises, and the fulfillment of specific socioeconomic demands of the working classes. Moreover, the relatively high standard of living influences the nature of social and political struggles, which, for this reason, are not intense or violent, but rather conducted with relative moderation and mildness. Contributing to this is the fact that the opposition is neither persecuted nor excluded from political processes, but is instead accepted and thus integrated into them by accepting the basic principles of the prevailing system.

In conclusion, we could say that in Great Britain, the compliance of successive governments with the informal and non-coercive rules of the “constitutional conventions” is ultimately explained by the fact that there is broad public consent to the existing political system, which accepts and legitimizes the established political institutions and thus enables their smooth functioning.

4. The Structure and Organization of British Political Parties – Party Systems

The growth of the electorate was one of the key driving forces behind the development of party machinery in Britain. British parties, particularly during the period 1960–90, increased their centralization and the autonomy of their parliamentary groups, while at the same time beginning to adopt a pan-collective model in their organization. In other words, they have retained the bureaucratic and centralized structure of mass parties, while at the same time maintaining the ideological flexibility that characterizes mass parties (Diamantopoulos, 1993).

However, any discussion of British political parties must also take into account their high degree of institutionalization. The British system is based on a long-standing and deeply rooted tradition. The three main parties of the United Kingdom are among the most institutionalized in Europe: the Liberals and the Conservatives have been in operation for two centuries, while the Labour Party has been active for 106 years—the longest-standing parties in Western Europe. In terms of electoral stability, it is observed that since 1922, when the two-party system of Labour and the Conservatives was established, their combined electoral strength has hovered around 80–85%, with each party averaging 41–43%. The same applies to the Liberals and local nationalist parties, such as the Scottish SNP, which experience fluctuations in their electoral appeal, as they are more receptive to discontent. Stable sources of funding include business leaders for the Conservatives and Liberals and trade unions for the Labour Party. In any case, any changes within the English parties are very minor in the context of their over-century-long history.

The link between the functioning of the parliamentary system and the two-party system has been a defining feature of the form it has taken in Great Britain (Anastasiadis, 1999:139). The two-party system, or “bipartisan system,” does not mean that there are only two parties, but rather that there are two main and large parties, and that each possesses both an electoral base and parliamentary representation sufficient to enable it to vie for power through democratic processes.

In 17th-century England, the Tories and Whigs emerged as political factions, which evolved during the 18th century into parliamentary groups of peers within an oligarchic parliamentary system. Following the electoral reform of 1832, however, they took shape as political parties—the Conservative and the Liberal, respectively—within an increasingly democratic parliamentary system. During the 19th century, these two parties together accounted for 80–90% of the electorate, with each representing roughly half of the voters. This situation continued into the 20th century, until the beginning of the “postwar” period. In the meantime, of course, other parties emerged, though they were small or merely groups, such as the radicals, the “Irish” Party, the Labor Union Party, and the Independent Labor Party, which were unable to alter the balance of political power “monopolized” by the two major parties.

After the Labour Party entered the political arena in 1906, it became the second-strongest party in England after the Conservatives, while the Liberals took third place, thus bringing the two-party system to an end. At the same time, several small parties emerged, such as the Communist and Fascist parties, which, however, failed to secure parliamentary representation. The existence of three major parties makes it difficult for any one of them to achieve an absolute parliamentary majority and, in any case, fosters government crises and political instability.

However, this situation did not last more than 13 years in England. The Liberal Party continued to decline: in the 1929 elections, it won only 59 seats in the House of Commons, compared to 260 for the Conservatives and 288 for Labour. The “absurdity” of the consequences of applying the first-past-the-post system is evident; in this specific case, it led to a flagrant underrepresentation of the Liberals. The fact is that from then on, the Liberals ceased to be regarded as a “party of power.” And the 1935 elections confirmed the decline of the Liberal Party, which had, in any case, completed the implementation of its progressive-for-the-time program and exhausted its historical role. From then on, England returned to its traditional two-party system, with the difference that the Labour Party had replaced the Liberal Party.

In the postwar era, the Conservative and Labour parties have alternated in power. As has been the case since the 19th century, neither of the two major parties typically wins more than two consecutive elections. It is rare for the same party to remain in power for three parliamentary terms (as the Conservative Party did from 1951 to 1964, though it returned in 1970 only to leave again in 1973). Furthermore, one of the two parties achieves an absolute majority in the House of Commons, given that the parliamentary strength of the third party (the Liberals) is very small. An exception is the current Labour government (alla han), which is a minority government supported by the small Liberal Party.

From 1950 to 1970, the political landscape was dominated by a two-party system. The combined share of the vote for Labour and the Conservatives reached its highest level of the 20th century at 91.8%, there was a steady alternation of governments, and the Liberals never exceeded 12 seats (Wildeman, 1992). The electoral shares of the two main parties approach an absolute majority: In 1955, the Conservatives reached 49.5%, while Labour reached 47.8% in 1966.

The period 1970–1979 was marked by a loosening of party polarization and a decline in the strength of the two major parties. In 1970, the average combined share of the Labour and Conservative parties fell from 91.8% of the vote to 74.8%. In general, certain pathologies are evident in the Labour-Conservative two-party system, perhaps natural given its sixty-year history up to that point.

In the elections held between 1979 and 1992, the Tories enjoyed absolute dominance, whether under M. Thatcher or J. Major. However, given the Conservatives' 18-year monopoly on power, one could speak of an asymmetrical two-party system, which significantly disrupted the traditional two-party system.

Finally, in the 1997–2005 party system, a trend toward rebalancing the system emerged with the resurgence of the Labour Party and its electoral victory under T. Blair. This rebalancing turned into Labour dominance, while at the same time the electoral shares of the two major parties declined more than ever before, and the first-past-the-post system became the main factor in maintaining the more artificial two-party system of the second half of the 20th century. No one can know for certain whether the crisis of the two-party system in recent years is structural or whether it is related to circumstantial factors, such as voter fatigue with political leaders, intra-party friction, and others.

5. Characteristics of the Two British Political Parties

The two main British political parties share certain key characteristics:

a) The Conservative Party. It is firmly organized into regional and local organizations, central bodies (annual conference, central council, and executive committee), and the parliamentary group led by the party leader, a position held, until 1965, the person chosen by the monarch to serve as prime minister. The Conservative Party's electoral base stands at around 13 million votes. Geographically, it is concentrated mainly in rural areas, particularly in southern England and along the eastern coast, as well as in most of Scotland. In addition to the majority of the rural population, the Conservative Party is also supported by a large segment of the middle class, the upper middle class, and "high society," as well as a significant portion—about a quarter—of the working class. Thus, the conservative party claims to be not a "class-based" but a "national" party.

However, the vast majority of its members are professionals or executives and managers of large companies and businesses, while the rest are petty bourgeois, farmers, journalists, and a few civil servants. Finally, ideologically, the Conservative Party seeks to preserve traditional institutions and relations with Commonwealth countries (the former British Empire), defend British interests, protect free enterprise against nationalization, and more.

β) *Το εργατικό κόμμα.* Έχει ιδιόμορφη οργάνωση, διότι εκτός από τα ατομικά μέλη έχει και «συλλογικά μέλη», δηλαδή εργατικά συνδικάτα, ενώσεις, συνεταιρισμούς και τοπικές οργανώσεις. Η οργάνωσή του που είναι αυστηρά διαρθρωμένη, έχει ως κεντρικά όργανα το ετήσιο συνέδριο και την εθνική εκτελεστική επιτροπή, καθώς και την κοινοβουλευτική ομάδα με επικεφαλής

τον αρχηγό, που εκλέγεται από αυτήν, αλλά κατόπιν αποκτά ουσιαστική ανεξαρτησία. Η εκλογική βάση του εργατικού κόμματος, ισοδύναμη βέβαια με του συντηρητικού, γύρω στα 13 εκατομμύρια, βρίσκεται ιδίως στις πυκνοκατοικημένες βιομηχανικές περιοχές της χώρας και στις μεγάλες πόλεις, αλλά είναι αρκετά σύνθετη. Αποτελείται από βιομηχανικούς εργάτες, κατά το 70% περίπου, και υπαλλήλους, καθώς και από ένα μέρος των μεσαίων τάξεων, επιστήμονες, ελεύθερους επαγγελματίες και «διανοούμενους».

Furthermore, a significant proportion of its parliamentary representation consists of workers—around two-fifths—with the remainder divided among members of the liberal professions, journalists, civil servants, and so on. The ideology of the Labor Party is very moderate and simply “reformist” social democratic, compared to the more conservative factions of the “Socialist International” to which it belongs. Finally, its program is pragmatic, with specific goals of “nationalization” and state intervention to raise the standard of living of the working classes.

6. The Survival of the Two-party System

In Great Britain, the survival of the “two-party system” is due to various factors, the most important of which appear to be:

- 1) Long-standing tradition. The “two-party system” has been in place in England for three consecutive centuries. In a country that is reluctant to introduce almost anything new, custom and “tradition” act as a constant barrier to change.
- 2) The current electoral system. A first-past-the-post system that does not “technically” favor the existence of a third party. A third party, especially a small one, may have a negative effect if it comes between the two major parties: by taking votes away from the ideologically closest party, it ultimately benefits the party with which it is most at odds.
- 3) Political and psychological factors. These play a significant role. It is not a matter of “theory,” but of the reality of wasted votes. The English citizen, known for his practical spirit, is not only accustomed to but also desires to vote usefully—that is, for a candidate and a party that objectively have a chance of success. They view the vote as a practical means of achieving a specific electoral outcome that will realize their will regarding the governance of the country. For this reason, they vote for “parties of power,” that is, parties that have the potential to win a majority in the elections.
- 4) Under the two-party system, the electorate is effectively given the opportunity to choose between two potential governments and two potential prime ministers. Voters, through their vote, choose a specific government program and directly determine the specific political leadership they want to govern them: they choose a government and a prime minister. They do not merely elect a Parliament, from which—through various combinations—any government or any prime minister might emerge that voters may not have even wanted or anticipated (as happens

in countries with more than two major parties). Thus, under the two-party system, the political position of the prime minister, as leader of the majority party, is necessarily strengthened, because his election takes on the character of a referendum.

- 5) Finally, the two-party system ensures governmental stability, a quality that the British voter has come to value.

7. The Consequences of the Two-party System

The implementation of the two-party system affects both the political nature and the overall behavior of the “ruling parties.”

- 1) In particular, the current electoral system is highly disadvantageous for any new party, and thus acts as a protective shield for the established political parties. New political movements do not risk running independently in elections as a small new party, because their failure is a foregone conclusion. They prefer to find a political home within one of the two major parties, hoping that there they will be able to act effectively, even if only in the long term. The same applies to the factions forming within existing parties: both these factions and the party leadership systematically avoid exacerbating differences that would lead to a split, which would have adverse consequences in the upcoming elections, not only for the party, but mainly for the splinter group, which would have no prospect of success under the current first-past-the-post electoral system. Thus, the two major English parties necessarily each represent a very broad ideological and political spectrum. Within each party, there is a right-wing, a centrist, and a left-wing faction. Generally speaking, however, one party brings together the conservative political forces, while the other brings together the generally progressive political forces (this was formerly the Liberal Party and is now the Labour Party).
- 2) Based on current data, the electorate is divided into two roughly equal political camps. However, there is also a segment of voters, around 20%, who are not firmly aligned with either the conservatives or the labor party, nor do they all belong to the liberals; they are in the “center.” It is therefore in every party’s interest not to alienate them, but to win them over. For this reason, both major parties strive not only to encompass and retain as broad a range of political views as possible within their ranks, but also to be moderate. Only through moderation—in the party’s principles, program, strategy, and tactics—can the mass of undecided voters, who are crucial to the election outcome, be attracted. Thus, the tendency of both major parties to lean toward the center is well-established.
- 3) The two-party system also contributes to the acceptance, on the part of both “ruling parties” and their voters, of certain rules of free competition between them, within the framework of existing legality. Each views both itself and the opposing party as tomorrow’s government. Furthermore, regarding this very point, it takes care to prepare and announce a feasible, realistic, and moderate program with practical measures during the elections, so as not to fail and disprove its promises.

For this reason, it has been systematically preparing, ever since it has been in the opposition, the so-called “shadow government” composed of the leading figures who will take over the respective ministries as soon as it comes to power. As for the opposing party, it has been ensuring, ever since it has been in government, that it behaves in the way it would like the opposing party to behave once it becomes the government.

Thus, a moderate political party based on mutual tolerance is created de facto. The two-party system contributes to the acceptance, by both “ruling parties,” of certain unquestionable principles that consistently govern British political life: these are the principles of dialogue, respect for the opposition, and the rotation of power.

8. The Voting Behavior of the English

8.1 Class alignment

Until the 1980s, a key conclusion among political scientists was that knowing a person’s class was sufficient to analyze the behavior of the English. The British people had a highly developed sense of class and aligned almost entirely with the party that represented their social position. It is noteworthy that such a class-oriented electorate supported a two-party system based on the alternation of power and thus on the governance of the country by class rivals. This is attributable to the flexibility of the upper British classes, who did not react as strongly to social mobility as they did to the strengthening of the other classes (Diamantopoulos, 1983).

8.2 The Decline of Class Divisions

As early as the 1970 elections, class alignment began to wane, with a sharp decline observed from the 1980s onward. British elections have transformed into a process of selecting the most suitable prime minister, resembling more of a presidential system. As the class vote declines, voters begin to identify themselves based on other dividing lines. Women, who have always constituted a significant electoral group, have historically supported the Conservatives, particularly with the rise of Margaret Thatcher to the party leadership, at which point feminism discovered its conservative variant (Campbell, 1987). In the most recent elections, however, younger women have shifted their support to the more progressive-feminist Labour Party. Nevertheless, women over the age of 34 remain skeptical of Labour. Overall, women gave 38% of their votes to Labour and 32% to the Tories. In contrast, men voted for both parties in equal measure, at 34% each. However, the class vote, though diminished, continues to play a decisive role.

9. Conclusions

An analysis of British political life reveals that the image of a stable two-party political system where everything runs smoothly and almost nothing has changed since the early 20th century is far from reality. In the last general election, the two-party system faced a crisis; it was rejected and voted down. There were numerous instances where the

dominance of Labour and the Conservatives was clearly based on the electoral system, creating an artificial two-party system and greatly distorting the popular mandate. In other cases, one of the two major parties monopolized power to such an extent that tendencies toward dominance emerged within the system.

For this reason, many political scientists have spoken of moving beyond the two-party system, anticipating a linear progression of the system toward a new form of organization. The most important factor enabling the political system to overcome any crisis and instability is the deep collective consensus among the British people in favor of stability in political life. Thus, no matter how distorted the popular will may become, no matter how dominant a single party may be during a given period, the electorate will consider legitimate any actions that preserve the traditional two-party system.

Creative Commons License Statement

This research work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. To view the complete legal code, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>. Under the terms of this license, members of the community may copy, distribute, and transmit the article, provided that proper, prominent, and unambiguous attribution is given to the authors, and the material is not used for commercial purposes or modified in any way. Reuse is only allowed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Name: Evgenia

Surname: Bazani

Degrees

1. Main Degree: Department of Primary Education

2. Additional degrees

a) Second university degree Title: Philosophy – Pedagogy and Psychology

b) Additional Degree Title: Human Resource Management and Administration

3. Title of Teaching Institution: Marasleio Teaching Institution

4. Postgraduate title. Title: Gender and Religion, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens – Department of Theology

5. First Foreign Language: Title: French DELF (1st Degree & 2nd Degree) Educational Institution: French Embassy

6. Additional Foreign Language Title: English and German

7. Computer Knowledge: Level 1 and 2

Literary and research work

"The position of women in the society of Mani"

Experience from performing duties

Pedagogical Institute of Primary Education (01-09-2023 to 26-06-2024)

Director of a school unit (16/11/2007 - 08/08/2011 at the 10th Primary School of Agia Paraskevi, 09/08/2011 - 31/07/2017 at the 5th Primary School of Chalandri, 01/08/2017 - 21/06/2023 at the 3rd Primary School of Vrillissia, 27-06-2024 to 31-07-2027 at the 13th Primary School of Chalandri).

Bibliography

- Anastasiadis, G. (1999). *History of Modern Political Institutions in Europe*, Thessaloniki: Scientific Books and Periodicals Publishing.
- Wildenmann, R. (1992). *Electoral Research, Electoral Behavior and Election Analysis*, Athens: Papazisis.
- Berstein, S. (2002). *Democracies, Authoritarian and Totalitarian Regimes in the 20th Century*, trans. Stroikos, H. & Voikos, S., Athens: Poikilia.
- Campbell, B. (1987). *The Iron Ladies: Why Women Vote Tory*, Virago Press. Retrieved from <https://beatricxcampbell.co.uk/books/the-iron-ladies/>
- Diamantopoulos, T. (1983). *Introduction to Politics*, Athens: Sakkoulas.
- Diamantopoulos, T. (1993). *The Party Phenomenon: Forms, Systems, and Party Families*, Athens: Papazisis.
- Diamantopoulos, T. (2001). *Electoral Systems: Theory and Practical Applications*, Athens: Patakis.
- Dicey, A. (1982). *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*. In: http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1714/0125_Bk.pdf
- Meny, Y. (1995). *Comparative Politics*, (trans.) Kyprianos, P. & Balias, S., Vol. A, Athens: Papazisis.
- David, N. (1994). *Elections and Electoral Behavior in Britain*, Wheatsheaf Harvesting Machine, Hertfordshire.
- Papagrighoriou, V. (2006). *Popular Sovereignty and Parliamentarism in England*, Athens: Sakkoulas.
- Trueman, C. (2015). "The British Constitution" [historylearningsite.co.uk](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk). The History Learning Site, 27. Στο: <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/british-politics/the-british-constitution/the-british-constitution>.