

Westminster model of british government essay sample

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Strong core executive- with a party leader, who also serves as Prime Minister, and ministers, who are chosen by the PM to form a cabinet to run the executive. □ Two-party system based on single member constituencies- parties are strong and nationalised, competing for the same issue on a nationwide scale □ Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition- referring to the political party with the second largest number of seats in the House of Commons which are invited by the monarchy to establish the Shadow Cabinet □ Parliamentary sovereignty- the belief that the legislative body is supreme above all other government institutions. There is no higher authority beyond parliament, although, theoretically, the monarch has power to dissolve parliament and the winner of the general elections seeks her permission to establish a government

Government are held accountable through the means of elections and parliamentary oversight- which is carried out with backbench rebellions in the majority party, Select Committees scrutinising departments, parliamentary audit and the Lords revising role □ Focus on institutions- the rules, procedures and formal organisation of the government. These operate in a machinery manner, at the disposal of the parliamentary majority □ Power centralised- with policy making on a nationwide scale and relatively weak local governments □ Accountability through elections- every 4/5 years. The population hold the government accountable and local constituents hold their local MP's accountable.

Whilst this has been the traditional view as to how British politics has operated, new theories and perspectives have challenged the assumptions made by the Westminster Model.

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Yusuf- Strengths of the Model

Weaknesses of the Model

Some believe that the PM is becoming too powerful- it is alleged that there is a 'presidentialisation' of policy making and that the Westminster Model concentrates too much power in the hands of the executive

The WM faces a challenge. As Philip Norton describes, 'recent decades have seen the erosion of the WM through fragmentation and isolation.

Fragmentation has occurred as a consequence of major constitutional changes... isolation has place as a result of a greater presidentialisation of politics and of (public) ignorance of government'- therefore suggesting that the WM has no 21st century use □ A number of groups have demanded political reform suggesting that there is discontent with the WM- e. g. Charter88, a British pressure group which advocated constitutional and electoral reform on the basis of a current lack of a written constitution □ Is the two-party system expressed by the WM outdated? Dunleavy (2005) believes that the traditional two-party system 'can no longer accommodate what voters want to talk and vote about'

After entering the EU in 1973, it has been suggested that parliamentary sovereignty has been lost and overall power has been ceded upwards. This was acknowledged by Rhodes in his Differentiated Model, when he discussed the idea of a 'hollowed-out state'. The European Government can now draft legislation which becomes transnational policy and spans all levels of government. The tension between EU and parliamentary sovereignty has recently been represented as the EU attempted to alter UK law which would

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mean that the ban on prisoners voting would be lifted in accordance with EU human rights legislation. Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, state, ' it remains the case that parliament is sovereign... it remains enforce unless and until parliament decide to change it' and MP Neil Parish stated- ' why on earth should it be European courts which overrule us?' Therefore, the resistance of MP's suggest that they still feel that they have the power to decide on legislation, suggesting that the WM is still essential and that it is wrong to presume that power has ceded upwards. □ Nevertheless, globalisation could also reduce parliamentary sovereignty- another aspect of Rhode's hollowing-out thesis.

It creates economic limits for parliament, in that they are under pressure to set attractive tax rates and flexible working practices in order to attract investment from MNC's. □ The Westminster narrowly focuses on the formal institutions of the political process- and ignores informal aspects, such as interest groups. It is clear that individuals play a part in influencing government policy, as was evident in the ' Citizen Audit' Programme at Sheffield University which found that, $\frac{3}{4}$'s of people had been involved in political activities, 22 million had signed a petition and 2. 5 million took part in a public demonstration □ Focuses too much on institutions rather than on behaviour and processes- indeed, it is important to focus on processes, such as voting behaviour, as they can create explanatory models which can assist the development of policy making processes □ Focuses too much on the elite and on central political institutions of the state, rather than all aspects of the political process. Andrew Gamble argues that politics should be

understood in terms of all aspects of social relations, such as gender, race, class and so on, rather than an activity centred on government institutions

The WM ignores the role of ideology and underlying ideas which shape political processes- whereas W. H. Greenleaf acknowledged the importance of ideology in British politics, believing that there is an ideological clash between 2 doctrines- collectivism, which seeks for a collective good and stresses the importance of a strong government, and individualism/libertarianism which stresses individual rights and limited government. He believed that these opposing tendencies help to explain the development of British politics over the past centuries. □ Dominant executive justified as a necessary means of ensuring effective government. Marxists argue that such a system simply reinforces the power of the wealthy and exaggerates inequality.

Power may not be concentrated into the hands of the executive. Smith (1999) questioned ' who holds power?', he claimed that power is dispersed and there must be cooperation for aims to be achieved rather than the assumption of the WM which suggests that the power is concentrated within a strong executive □ Is it outdated? Unlike other European states, the UK's political development has largely been retained in its medieval roots, even the concept of the crown-in-parliament has been retained even though the personal role of the monarch in government has ended Conclusion

Does it face a challenge?

Perhaps we should agree with Andrew Gamble, who believed that ' the

Westminster Model has weakened but it has not disappeared, nor has it been replaced by a coherent alternative' (p419)

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