

An analysis of democracy in the uk



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Just how democratic is Britain? I will examine the most important aspects of the British society, from political to cultural. The focus of the essay is to understand whether a democracy actually works in favour over the citizens of the United Kingdom. In order to do this, I will use arguments for and against several elements that contribute to the democracy of a society and produce a plausible conclusion as to whether this is currently exercised in the Great Britain. The essay will be divided into three sections in an effort to make points more simplistic. Those parts are: political, legal, and cultural. Each part will then be broken down into arguments for and against the general question.

Questions to consider:

- What is democracy?
- Can democracy be defined?
- What factors make up a democratic society?
- Is the term ' for the people, by the people' true?
- Does the first past the post system exploit the wishes of the citizens?
- How can the idea of democracy damage a country?
- Should Britain have a written constitution?
- Is there a real separation of power in the United Kingdom?
- Should the government enforce laws that prevent religious beliefs in a democracy?
- Can Britain be described as a democratic society?

Detailed Outline

Paragraph 1 - Introduction

Introduction: Democracy is a word commonly used to describe the British political system. Words such as freedom, equality and terms such as 'people rule' are often reiterated as the principle elements that make a society democratic. From the very inception of the word the term democracy in ancient Greek times, the basis has remained unkempt and precise over thousands of years: majority rule. However, over the past five decades, this one very clear view of democracy has been blurred or somewhat misconceived in Britain, leading to a justified 'war' between the people and the state.

Topic Sentence: Democracy is a word commonly used to describe the British political system.

Thesis statement: Although, it may be perceived that the United Kingdom boasts one of the strongest democracies in the world, there are many factors whether legal, political or cultural that are very undemocratic.

Supporting source(s): Copp, Hampton and Roemer, 1993; Inoguchi, Newman and Keane, 1998

Paragraph 2

Introduction of political aspect

Topic sentence: The political system currently being exercised in the United Kingdom is one that is often praised and immortalized.

Paragraph 3

First argument in favour of political aspects: The general public is responsible for choosing who represents them.

Topic sentence: The main basis of democracy is protected in Britain; citizens partake in free and fair elections which allow them to select those who they want to govern them.

Supporting source(s): Wheeler, 2009

Paragraph 4

Counter-argument against the first argument: The public selects the House of Commons, not the House of Lords who exercise the same amount of power if not more in Britain.

Topic sentence: A concerning factor present in the English political arena is the elitist House of Lords and their selection.

Supporting source(s): Cole, 2006; Wheeler, 2009;

Paragraph 5

Second argument in favour of political aspects: The first past the poll system of voting allows for free and fair voting.

Topic sentence: One of the many democratic aspects the British claim is the first past the post system.

Supporting source(s): Lijphart, 2008

Paragraph 6

Counter-argument against second argument in favour of politically democratic aspects of British society: First past the post system is democratic in theory but not in reality.

Topic sentence: Even though the first past the post system is seen as representative of the society wishes, there are several discrepancies in this system which would cause an uneven representation of the general public.

Supporting source(s): Cole, 2006; Wheeler, 2009

Paragraph 7

Introduction of the legal aspect

Topic sentence: Apart the political implications, there are several legal factors that make many question whether these policies are really in place to benefit society.

Supporting source(s): To be found

Paragraph 8

First argument in favour of legal aspects: Written constitution

Topic sentence: The absence of a written constitution from the English Legal System has always been seen as advantageous to the British society.

Supporting source(s): Bogdanor, Khaitan and Vogenauer, 2007

Paragraph 9

Counter-argument against first argument in favour of legal aspects:

Unwritten constitutions give the state to constantly change anything that could affect the well being of the society.

Topic sentence: Even though unwritten constitutions are flexible, it places a tremendous amount of power in the state hands.

Supporting source(s): Bogdanor, Khaitan and Vogenauer, 2007, Wheeler, 2009

Paragraph 10

Second argument in favour of the law: Separation of powers

Topic sentence: The separation of power is a very important part of the English Legal system, which is said to be very democratic.

Supporting source(s): Epstein, 1994

Paragraph 11

Counter-argument against the second argument in favour of the law:

Separation of powers is merely a textbook doctrine.

Topic sentence: As with many other doctrines in the English Legal System, the separation of powers may work in theory but not in reality.

Supporting source(s): Epstein, 1994

Paragraph 12

Introduction of cultural aspect

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Topic sentence: Perhaps, one of the most important aspects of a democratic society is the cultural aspect which embodies religion to freedom of speech.

Paragraph 13

First argument in favour of cultural aspects: Britain embraces all religions

Topic sentence: Britain is said to be one of the most multicultural nations in modern Europe embracing several types of races and religions.

Supporting source(s): Lijphart, 2005

Paragraph 14

Counter argument against first argument in favour of cultural aspects: There is no separation of the church from the state.

Topic sentence: The British society claims to embrace all religions but there is still no separation of the church from the state.

Supporting source(s): Cole, 2006

Paragraph 15

Second argument in favour of culture: The state enforces any necessary structures to protect the country.

Topic sentence: Another necessity to a democratic society is the protection of its citizens.

Supporting source(s): Crossman, 2007

Paragraph 16

Counter-argument against the second argument in favour of culture: The right to protect is not the right to violate

Topic sentence: It is imminent that the lives of those inhabiting a country should be aptly protected by the state but privacy invasion is not in any form or fashion democratic.

Supporting source(s): Crossman, 2007

Paragraph 17

A discussion examining both sides of whether Britain can be considered a democratic nation.

Topic sentence: There is sufficient evidence to show that there are several issues that signify Britain's lack of democratic practices. It is also clear that the views and rights of the general public are often ignored. However, due to society's ignorance or lack of interest concerning this, much cannot be done to alleviate the situation.

Supporting source(s): Cole, 2006; Copp, Hampton and Roemer, 1993; Inoguchi, Newman & Keane, 1998

Paragraph 18 - Conclusion

Restatement of the thesis statement: In conclusion, even though the United Kingdom prides itself as being one of the most democratic nations in the world, the recent actions of the state and the constant infringement of the

citizen's rights could lead one to question how democratic the British society really is.

Summary of main points of the essay: Political: voting system; Legal: written constitution, separation of powers; Cultural: religion, privacy.

Concluding remarks: The United Kingdom may be considered a democracy on paper but in reality several of their policies are undemocratic.

Annotated Bibliography

Books

Reference: Cole, M. (2006) Democracy in Britain. Edinburgh University Press

Cole's (2006) fifth chapter in his critically acclaimed academic book, 'Democracy in Britain' is aimed at the critique of the British democratic system. Cole is aiming for a reading audience of those interested in politics and possibly international relations and uses up-to-date and relevant information to help prove his arguments. In this chapter, Cole focuses on the negative layers of a system which is regularly praised. He uses the downfalls of the British political system such as the voting system, the House of Lords and pluralism to support his arguments. Although the rest of the book focuses on the positive aspects of British democracy, this chapter encompasses a critical overview of the negative side with the use of evidence to support his arguments. This chapter will be of particular use in my third, sixth, fourteenth and seventeenth paragraphs respectively, to show that the first past the post voting system has failed as a democratic

entity, the House of Lords is unjustified and that the doctrine of pluralism may be a part of theoretical Britain but it is not practiced.

Reference: Copp, D., Hampton, J. & Roemer, J. E. (1993) *The Idea of Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Copp, Hampton and Roemer's (1993) book is aimed at the political science arena and uses relevant information to cover every area of democracy ranging from its origin to its future. The authors discuss the stability of democracy and answer a number of fundamental questions that needed urgent assessment in the wake of new democratic regimes surfacing in the 21st Century. The book spawns a collection of essays from various prominent contributors in the political, legal and philosophical realms. The authors use several arguments and opinions in an effort to give a balanced critique of democracy. This book and the diverse opinions in it will help in the introduction and conclusion of my essay.

Reference: Inoguchi, T., Newman, E. & Keane, J. (1998). *The Changing Nature of Democracy*. New York: United Nations University Press.

Inoguchi, Newman and Keane's (1998) introductory article to their book 'The Changing Nature of Democracy' is a credible collection of work edited by the authors. Inoguchi and Keane, both political science professors and Keane, an international relations lecturer, aim their book at political science students. As the name suggests, the book analyzes the changes that democracy has seen in the last 40 years. The book is a collection of essays from renowned political professors who all acknowledged the presence of democracy in every aspect of modern day society. It introduces several definitions of the

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term ' democracy' then goes onto dissecting into segments ranging from social factors to global forces using a number of democratic nations from around the world to solidify points. This book is critical and informative and shows that democracy is a changing policy and will continue to change according to society. The authors pay special attention to presenting neutral articles and argue both sides. This book will be used in the introduction and discussion segment of the essay.

Reference: Lijphart, A. (2008) Thinking About Democracy. New York: Routledge.

Lijphart's (2008) book is a collection of work that is current and sufficient and is particularly aimed at avid political science researchers. Thinking about democracy covers several areas of democracy, tracing the process of its development over the last 40 years. The main theme is European democracy but the author uses India and South Africa to purport some of the points rose. The regular dimensions of democracy are explored such as majoritarian election system and reform. Lijphart, an influential political scientist uses analytical and scholarly writing to argue many fundamental points in his book. This book will be helpful proving that the first post the post system is fair and that the British is actually a pluralist society.

Journals

Reference: Epstein, L. (1994) ' Changing perceptions of the British system' Political Science Quarterly. Volume 109, No. 3 Special Issue 1994, pp. 483-512.

Epstein (1994), a scholar in the political sphere, uses his article published in the Political Science Quarterly to present a report on parliamentary democracy in Britain. The ideas in the article are relevant and logical and give a clear indication of its point to the readers. While the article serves as a comparison between the American and British systems, it implicates several points about constitutional reform, election methods, separation of powers and the House of Lords. Several of the problems facing the British system are compared to the American system. Epstein uses the British democratic system to devise whether the Americans should follow their policies, highlighting benefits and consequences of the British system. Apart from the fact that the article was compiled in 1994, many of the facts are still prevalent in the 21st Century. I will be using this article to support and refute the issue of separation of powers in Britain.

Reference: Bogdanor, V., Khaitan, T., & Vogenauer, S. (2007). Should Britain have a written constitution? *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 4, October-December 2007

Bogdanor, Khaitan and Vogenauer's (2007) article is aimed at anyone having an interest in political science and offers up-to-date information about the topic being argued. The British have always had an unwritten constitution and the government seemed to be thriving under this regime. However, many wonder if recent changes in society can still allow for societies to exist without codified rules that govern their nation. The approach of some is to leave the constitution as it is while some believe it is time to show that Britain has these rules. Comparisons to other nations that have written constitutions such as the United States of America are made.

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Even though the authors may appear biased in their findings, it was a credible and supported article that gave sufficient evidence from both sides. This journal will be used in the legal segment of my essay to argue for and against the constitutional issue in Britain.

Websites

Reference: Crossman, G. (2007) Overlooked: Surveillance and personal privacy in Modern Britain. [Online] Available at: <http://www.liberty-human-rights-org.uk/issues/3-privacy/pdfs/liberty-privacy-report.pdf> [Accessed: 15 Feb 10]

Crossman's (2007) report is a credible and informative piece aimed at anyone who is interested in public policies. The author, Gareth Crossman, is an activist who petitions on behalf of the Liberty foundation, a website that enables and fights for human rights. The report examines privacy in the United Kingdom and the role the state and the media should play in imposing on the lives of others. Different aspects of privacy are examined in the introductory parts of the essay but Sections three, four and eight are of particular interest to my argument. Findings indicate that the media is more inclined to expose those in the public eye rather than the general public and the state has the right to put initiatives in place to protect the country. At the same time, it is recommended that both the media and government use their powers without invading on the lives of innocent people and find a wave length that clearly shows it is for protection purposes. The report examines the entire privacy argument and uses analytical writing to argue both for and against the issue. This report will help to argue the points in the

cultural aspect of the essay concerning privacy and show that although the government may consider itself justified in its actions, that this must be done while keeping the reasonable man in mind.

Reference: Wheeler, B. (2009) Time for a Westminster revolution? BBC News. [Online] Available at http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8060896.stm?ad=1 [Accessed: 15 Feb 10]

Wheeler (2009), a political reporter for BBC News aims this article at the general public particularly those interested in British politics and uses current and reliable information to argue his views. The article covers the democratic system in Britain and whether it may be in need of some reformation in the near future. It highlights a number of changes that are being sought to replace the old system of democracy. There is an analysis of both sides of the argument, showing those that believe strongly in reformation and those who believe reformation will weaken the system rather than strengthen it. The author uses his expertise and argumentative writing to assess both sides of the argument. Although he made his opinion on the matter clear he avoided the use of biased writing and produced a very critical, coherent text. This article will be useful in the political aspect of the question and will help to support and refute some of my arguments about the voting system in the United Kingdom.