



This is a repository copy of *Whither the centre? Tracing centralisation and fragmentation in UK politics..*

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/212531/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Ward, J. orcid.org/0000-0002-3605-9931, Ward, B. and Kerr, P. (2025) *Whither the centre? Tracing centralisation and fragmentation in UK politics*. *Political Studies Review*, 23 (2). pp. 445-460. ISSN 1478-9299

<https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299241258629>

---

© 2024 The Author(s). Except as otherwise noted, this author-accepted version of a journal article published in *Political Studies Review* is made available via the University of Sheffield Research Publications and Copyright Policy under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Reuse**

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

**WHITHER THE CENTRE? TRACING CENTRALISATION AND FRAGMENTATION IN UK POLITICS**

---

This article explores the question of how to conceptualise the location, capacity, and effectiveness of the ‘centre’ in the UK policymaking process. Whilst literature on UK governance has historically featured avid disagreements about the power and capacity of central government, we identify a more recent convergence around the idea that UK government is characterised by persistent centralisation of decision-making alongside a fragmentation of policy delivery and frontline capacity. Through a detailed review of UK governance debates we trace the development of two, seemingly contradictory, schools of thought: the centralisation school and the fragmentation school. We then identify an emerging consensus which recognises a continuous and uneven centripetal-centrifugal dynamic and the concurrence of both centralisation and fragmentation. We contend that changes to the British political context following the 2016 EU referendum buttress the claim that UK politics is shaped by twin processes of centralisation and fragmentation, reinforcing tensions between a centre that desires power and a range of forces eroding its capacity to deliver. Our overall contention is that the notion of ‘power without capacity’ effectively captures the contemporary character of the ‘centre’.

---

A longstanding puzzle for students and scholars of UK politics is how to comprehend a governing landscape characterised by the coexistence of a centralised state that persistently hoards power, and a public policy context characterised by complexity, fragmentation, and implementation gaps. Whilst for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the field was dominated by the precepts of the Westminster Model (WM) and the recognition that the British state was highly centralised, from the 1970s scholars began to highlight the gap between the WM image and policymaking reality. In tandem with the advent of neoliberalism, such scholarship prompted a new school of thought which contended that the power of central government was becoming increasingly fragmented. Under the banner of ‘governance’, this school advanced a pluralist interpretation of UK politics emphasising the diffusion of power across multi-levelled structures, both vertically (to supranational/international organisations and local/devolved government) and horizontally (to NGOs, arms-length bodies, and private actors) (Rhodes 1997). This perspective became increasingly influential in both the UK and further afield and was described as the ‘new orthodoxy’ by the 2000s (Marsh 2011). However, continuity of the central tenets of the British system led many to reject this account. Asymmetries and hierarchies of power, it was countered, continued to characterise a system dominated by the institutions of Westminster and Whitehall, epitomised by the notion that ‘central government knows best’ (Marsh *et al.* 2003).

Given this divergence in the literature, how should new students and researchers seek to make sense of contemporary UK politics? We offer two contributions on the role of the ‘centre’ in UK politics to help answer this question. Firstly, we review and compare different models of UK governance to shed light on the development of two, seemingly incompatible, schools of thought – the ‘centralisation school’ and the ‘fragmentation school’. We present a new reading of these debates, highlighting points of convergence initially within the core executive studies literature and more recently within debates around ‘metagovernance’. This narrative reveals a growing consensus that UK politics is characterised by a centripetal-centrifugal dynamic which creates tensions between a power-hoarding centre and a range of forces gradually eroding its capacity to deliver. Secondly, through an assessment of recent empirical developments, we introduce the notion of ‘power without capacity’ to frame these tensions. Whilst the gap between policy intent and policy implementation has long been acknowledged in the literature, we contend that this framing adds weight to the idea that UK central government retains its thirst for power yet suffers an increasing inability to deliver many of its key objectives.

#### **Centralisation or fragmentation of the British state?**

In their account of the governance dynamics surrounding Covid-19 and the putative ‘levelling-up’ programme of the post-2019 Conservative administrations, Richards *et al.* (2023: 45) argue that these cases illustrate how, in the UK, ‘the state is centralised in terms of power but fragmented in relation to public administration and policy delivery’. Similarly, in their analysis of the levelling-up agenda, Newman *et al.* (2023: 14) list multiple governing problems resulting from the devolution strategies of successive administrations which have worked to reinforce the UK’s ‘centralised statism’ alongside ‘fragmentation of local remits and responsibilities’. Elsewhere, Jones and Hameiri’s (2021: 17) comparison of the UK’s pandemic management to South Korea reveals how the British state’s outsourcing-dependency has produced policy outcomes which are ‘simultaneously hyper-centralised and yet highly fragmented and ineffective’. Likewise, Flinders and Huggins (2021) have contrasted the idea of ‘representative and responsible’ government – central to the WM – with the increasingly ‘complex reality of governance’, creating a ‘governance gap’ between public expectations of politicians control and growing constraints on their ability to effect change.

A picture of ‘incoherence’ then, to borrow Richards *et al.*’s terminology, has emerged across the literature on UK governance. This emerging consensus, we contend, centres on recognition of: 1) a continued dominance of central government decision-making; 2) the importance of resource dependencies between government and other policy actors; and, 3) the increasing fragmentation of policy delivery and frontline capacity. In the following sections, we chart the lineage(s) of this view of a centralised but fragmented state, tracing its trajectory from within two distinct and seemingly

contradictory schools of thought: the centralisation school and the fragmentation school. Whilst the former insists the balance of power has always, and continues, to gravitate towards the centre, the latter stresses the increasing diffusion produced by fragmentation and complexity. This divergence long-precluded productive engagement between perspectives. However, as outlined above, over time insights from both schools have combined to reveal how the dual forces of centralisation and fragmentation have intensified an evergreen tension between the power to decide policy and the capacity to deliver.

#### Core Executive Studies

A chronological review of these debates would begin with the WM (see below) as the traditional organising framework for analysing UK politics. However, in tracing the emergence and gradual convergence of the centralisation and fragmentation schools, we begin with scholarship on core executive studies of the 1980s-1990s. This is not to say that the themes of centralisation and fragmentation began with literature on the core executive. Recognition of the perennial problem of a gap between decision-making intent and policy implementation and outcome, alongside key concepts such as 'policy communities' and 'bounded rationality', were established by scholars in the 1970s (e.g., Richardson & Jordan 1979; see Cairney 2012: Ch. 5). Rather, our contention is that the notion of the 'core executive' was crucial to the later demarcation of analyses into the two main schools.

The framework of core executive studies aimed to shed what its proponents saw as the increasingly outdated and inaccurate WM, instead seeking to provide a 'a neutral description of a field of study', adaptable for empirical application in different geographical contexts (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990: 4). Initially, the framework adopted a self-consciously broad definition of the core executive due to its recognition of 'resource dependency', the notion that power is not fixed within a particular institution or location – e.g., the Cabinet or Prime Minister – but is interdependent and relational, existing in the connections between different elements of the system and 'resource relations' between 'core executive actors' (Elgie 2011: 66; also Rhodes 1995). Nevertheless, the field maintained a focus on central government and accordingly defined the core executive as: *'all those organisations and procedures which coordinate central government policies, and act as final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine'* (Rhodes 1995: 12).

Core executive scholars have adapted their definitions over time, accounting for shifts in the composition of the centre. Rhodes initially focused on institutions within the vicinity of the Prime Minister: Cabinet, Cabinet Committees, counterpart official committees, as well as coordinating departments (e.g., Cabinet Office, Treasury). However, Smith (1999: 5) reoriented the focus towards central government departments on the grounds that 'they are the core policy-making units', overseen

by ‘ministers who are key actors within the institutions of the core executive’ (also see Smith *et al.* 1995). More recently, Dorey (2020) updated the definition to include special advisers and junior ministers, whilst Dunleavy (2018: 205) included the ‘Bank of England’ as a key actor within the core executive. Though the appreciation of contingency and change is a merit of this approach, such broad definitions arguably sacrifice some of the initial conceptual clarity.

Though often under-acknowledged in the literature, the emphasis on resource dependency or ‘exchange relations’ in core executive studies is critical to understanding the divergence between those who, drawing on the WM, would go on to emphasise the persistent role of structural power and inequality within a highly centralised system – the ‘centralisation school’ – and those accentuating the fragmented character of ‘governance’, alongside the gradual erosion of central power and the declining utility of the WM – the ‘fragmentation school’. Yet the idea of power as relational and contingent simultaneously provided a foundation for both the divergence between the two schools and their subsequent convergence. We chart both these developments over the next three sections.

## **The Centralisation School: preserving governmental autonomy**

### *The Westminster Model*

As the prevailing ‘meta-constitutional orientation’ of UK politics, the WM combines a range of normative and institutional components to provide a shorthand for how the British system was historically perceived, and supposed, to operate (Gamble, 1990; Flinders, 2010). **From the outset the model was underpinned by a Whig-historical perspective imbued with ideas of organic development which informed the export of Westminster as an institutional blueprint to British colonies<sup>1</sup>.** In the UK, the WM was traditionally said to comprise: a concentration of executive power in one party; cabinet dominance; a two-party system; a majoritarian electoral system; unitary and centralised government; interest group pluralism; the concentration of legislative power in parliament; constitutional flexibility; absence of judicial review; and a central bank controlled by the executive (Lijphart 2012). Despite such a broad range of components, for many years studies of the WM focused narrowly on the balance of power between the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990). This institutionalist focus has more recently considered the apparent tension between parliamentary sovereignty and executive dominance (Barnard 2022), with studies also highlighting the subtle means through which parliamentary power is exercised (Russell and Gover 2017).

---

<sup>1</sup> The spread of these political institutions was underpinned by an ideology which deemed colonial territories as inferior based on various forms of racialisation (Akram 2023).

Scholars have noted that gradual European accession and New Labour's constitutional reform programme placed pressure on the institutional foundations of the WM (e.g., Flinders 2010). Although these reforms undoubtedly conflicted with the central pillars of the WM (see below), the model remains relevant to UK politics for (at least) two reasons. First, constitutional flexibility remains a key component of the UK political system. The idea that political, rather than codified legal, processes and pressures – such as democratic elections and parliamentary conventions – uphold accountability and responsibility in UK politics, remains salient (Wright 2020). No category of law or source of authority sits above parliament, which is free to govern as it sees fit. This conceptualisation of 'representative and responsible government', with leaders trusted to act in the 'national interest', continues to guide the discourse of elites as reflected in official documents such as the Ministerial Code and the Cabinet Manual (Flinders *et al.* 2021). As Hall (2011: 17) summarised, the WM continues to be a 'a widely believed and promulgated self-image of the institutions and processes of British politics'.

Second, the WM draws attention to the fact that the institutions of the British state have shown a remarkable resilience and proclivity for incremental reform without root and branch transformation. UK politics still largely operates under a majoritarian system with a strong notion of parliamentary sovereignty which centralises considerable power in the PM who handpicks the executive. **The devolution of powers to Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish legislatures presented a clear challenge to this model, prompting claims of 'bi-constitutionalism' and the emergence of alternative visions of sovereignty (Flinders 2010; Richards & Smith 2015; Brown Swan & Kenny 2024). However, the repoliticisation of devolution post-2016 has indicated that processes which cement the power of a narrow Westminster elite persist, epitomised by the UK government's deployment of a Section 35 Order to block Scottish legislation in 2023 (Baldini *et al.* 2022).** Though the model underappreciates the complexity introduced into the system in recent decades, therefore, its emphasis on the *concentration of power* ensures it remains the cornerstone of the 'centralisation school'.

#### *The British Political Tradition and the Asymmetric Power Model*

Debates around 'resource dependency' and the 'relationality' of power led to the emergence of clear divisions within the core executive scholarship. As one of the pioneers of the core executive framework, Rhodes (1997) built on these insights to articulate the 'differentiated polity model', a comprehensive refutation of the WM which contended that, alongside growing evidence of extant and unavoidable implementation gaps, neoliberalism had instigated a vast reduction in the power and authority of the British state, with markets, policy networks, and delegated governance replacing centralised control. In response, Marsh *et al.* questioned Rhodes' account and combined institutional features of the WM with the concept of resource dependency to argue that relational power operates

within a fundamentally asymmetrical system: ‘The core executive is segmented, but even so, the key resources in the system lie with the PM and the Chancellor’ (Marsh *et al.* 2003: 308). The alternative ‘Asymmetric Power Model’ (APM) argued that an understanding of external networks should not replace a primary focus on central government and relations between actors *within* it – especially departments and coordinating units – and between the centre and external political institutions (see Smith *et al.* 1995; Smith 1999).

The APM also emphasised the interplay between structures and ideas. On the former, the APM insisted UK politics was shaped by patterns of ‘structured inequality’ in terms of who held key positions in government, and that these inequalities were representative of broader socio-economic inequalities (Marsh *et al.* 2003: 309-10). On the latter, the framework built on Marsh’s earlier work on the prevalence of a singular, elitist British Political Tradition (BPT) (Marsh *et al.* 2001; Hall 2011). Drawing from Birch (1964), Marsh argued that dominant ideas about democracy and political practice in the UK convey a limited notion of ‘representation’ and a conservative notion of ‘responsibility’, thereby cementing a model of hierarchical, centralised and largely secretive government remarkably resistant to change. This tradition legitimises concentration of executive power in central government – i.e., Whitehall – with even parliament limited in its ability to enforce executive accountability (Barnard 2022; Hall *et al.*, 2018: 367-8).

The APM and BPT both build on core executive studies’ focus on the centre while incorporating the concept of ‘resource dependency’ to move beyond the rigid, ‘zero-sum’ conception of power resting within institutions implied by the WM. However, this work sits firmly within the centralisation school as it emphasises how, despite multiple phases of reform, accommodation rather than replacement of the BPT ensured elements of the core executive retained considerably more power over the policymaking process than other parts of the political system.

## **The Fragmentation School: diffusion and differentiation**

### *From the Differentiated Polity to Decentred Governance*

In contrast to the BPT and the WM, Rhodes (1997) extended the idea of resource-dependency to articulate the more pluralist DPM. Its central premise was that centralised ‘government’ control over policy has been displaced by a more fragmented and complex system of ‘governance’ across multiple networks. The ‘hollowing out of the state’ initiated by the Thatcher and Major governments, particularly through contracting out and privatisation of public services, significantly altered the character of UK governance. Britain’s unitary state became ‘differentiated’ as power moved upwards, downwards, and sideways to multiple institutions and policy actors. The centre was increasingly

segmented within this system of ‘governance’, with central governments finding it difficult to ‘steer’ and coordinate policy, let alone adopt a more hands-on ‘rowing’ approach (Osborne and Gaebler 1993). This led Rhodes to conclude that the government retained power to set the direction of travel for policy but relinquished much of the capacity to implement it (Rhodes 1995: 30-31).

Rhodes’s initial iteration of the DPM preserved some role for structural constraints and acknowledged the ‘asymmetric’ nature of central-local government relations (Rhodes 1997: 17; Marsh *et al.* 2001: 9). However, as this work progressed in a more interpretivist direction structural factors were disavowed as ‘unhelpfully vague’ (Bevir & Rhodes 2008: 730). Bevir and Rhodes subsequently sought to ‘*decentre governance*’ through a ‘focus on the social construction of policy networks through the ability of individuals to create meanings’. In refuting the idea of a dominant British political tradition, they instead emphasised the existence of multiple, discrete *traditions* in UK politics, redirecting focus away from formal institutions which were deemed to be limited by ‘modernist empiricism or positivism’. Instead, the focus shifted towards the role of multiple actors and traditions in developing a ‘contingent pattern of rule through conflicting actions’ (Bevir & Rhodes 2006: 98). This focus on ‘meaning in action’ was operationalised through deployment of ethnographic and dilemma-based methods (see Geddes 2019), which, whilst retaining elements of core executive studies’ framework, were generally more interested in the centrifugal impulse drawing power away from the centre.

### *Multi-level governance*

Originating in the field of European Union (EU) studies, the notion of ‘multi-level governance’ (MLG) became something of a mantra across political science and public policy from the 1990s-2000s. The term referred to the complex arrangements of cooperation and negotiation between public institutions in the construction and implementation of policy (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). The ‘multi-level’ aspect referred to the overlapping levels of territorial power at different regional, supranational, and international tiers, whilst ‘governance’ referred to the horizontal displacement of the policy-making powers of central government to a broad range of non-state actors, including private businesses and NGOs (Harmes 2006). The field echoes elements of the DPM, particularly through the emphasis on ‘governance’ over government, reflecting the observation that national governments have lost a significant degree of control over the policy process, with power dispersed to a multiple range of actors throughout this vast multi-tiered system (see Bache and Flinders 2004).

As a result, this work challenges ‘mono-centric’ state-focused perspectives, contending that the ‘reallocation of authority upward, downward and sideways’ (Hooghe and Marks 2003: 233) resulted in a system of ‘polycentric governance’. This latter term connotes ‘many centers of decision making that are formally independent of each other’, though functions may overlap in certain cases (Ostrom



*et al.*, cited in Ostrom 2010: 643; see also Bache *et al.* 2016). However, the divisions which emerged from core executive studies are replicated in the MLG literature. Some scholars emphasise the continued role of structural power, hierarchy and the continued dominance of the centre, as well as the extent to which resource dependency and exchange relationships have grown or developed over time (Marinetto 2003). Others from the field of public policy, such as Paul Cairney (2022), have built on Rhodes's framework of decentred analysis to highlight how the dispersal of power across multiple centres restricts UK central government actors' ability to fulfil the WM narrative of strong, central government control. In this sense, Cairney *et al.* (2019) have noted how – within public policy in particular – the influence of MLG has contributed to poly- or 'multi-centric' policymaking representing the 'conventional wisdom' (Cairney 2022: 52).

This highlights the centrality of MLG scholarship to the 'fragmentation school' in UK politics, particularly through the influence of policy studies. However, it also speaks to a normative divergence between scholars who view devolutionary shifts positively and those who are sceptical. On the one hand, plural and decentralized policy networks are said to reflect the heterogeneous preferences of citizens, disperse power to a range of actors, and facilitate flexibility, innovation, and experimentation. On the other, MLG obscures lines of accountability and undermines the authority of publicly elected democratic bodies, creating opportunities for 'blame-shifting' (Hood 2011). This has become particularly pronounced in the UK post-2016, with Brexit, Covid-19 management and the 'Levelling-Up' agenda entrenching such divisions and replacing the outdated normative biases behind the WM with alternative assumptions that central government is opaque and ineffective, and devolved government is the opposite (Morphet 2021; Richards *et al.* 2023).

#### **Metagovernance: the two schools converged?**

As noted above, implicit within the DPM and MLG literature is the notion that central governments no longer have the capacity to fully implement policy and deliver services and are instead confined to 'steering' policy coordination and implementation. System(s) of governance have become so fragmented and complex that government attempts to steer policymaking must operate at different levels and sometimes over different policy areas concurrently. The concept of 'metagovernance' emerged in response to this context. Broadly defined, metagovernance concerns 'the governance of governance', that is, the means through which central government coordinates 'ground rules for governance and the regulatory order in and through which governance partners...pursue their aims' (Jessop 2016: 16; also Sørensen and Torfing 2009).

However, within this literature dispute remains as to the purchase the central state can exercise within this complex policymaking landscape. Some reiterate the primacy of the central state and continued

asymmetries in policymaking through the notion of ‘the shadow of hierarchy’ (Bell & Hindmoor 2009; Warner *et al.* 2023), whilst others position the concept within more pluralist forms of networked governance in which the state comprises one (albeit important) actor (Cairney *et al.* 2019). This spectrum of opinion is mirrored to some extent in the range of mechanisms through which metagovernance is said to operate. Bailey and Wood (2017) categorise these into ‘hands-on’ – direct involvement from the central state in maintaining governance structures and networks – and ‘hands-off’ – indirect involvement through design and political framing. The divisions which emerged in the context of core executive studies debates in the 1990s-2000s, therefore, continue to influence perspectives on metagovernance. Rhodes’s work (2017: Ch. 12), for example, has rejected the (re)prioritisation of the state in much metagovernance scholarship which he deems inconsistent with an interpretivist methodology of ‘decentred analysis’.

However, we contend that the spectrum of perspectives facilitated by metagovernance scholarship signals the foundations of a convergence between the centralisation and fragmentation schools. Whilst the notion of ‘steering rather than rowing’ lies at the heart of metagovernance, UK politics scholars have noted how the centre, sometimes referred to as the ‘hollow crown’ or ‘polo-mint hole’, seems increasingly incapable not only of delivering policy, but also of coordinating ‘at a distance’ (Diamond and Laffin 2022: 213; Dommett and Flinders 2015: 2). Though at first glance this might suggest further fragmentation, a substantial seam of scholarship has sought to illuminate how the centre has confronted the complexity of coordinating policy by refurbishing ‘core executive capacity and capability’ (Shaw and Eichbaum, 2014: 608; Ward and Ward 2023). A pertinent example in the context of austerity is the Cameron government’s attempt to strengthen control of an increasingly complex network of non-departmental public bodies (NDPB) by reducing them, as well as increasing the oversight and monitoring powers of both the Cabinet Office and the Treasury (Dommett and Flinders 2015; Warner *et al.* 2021). This balance of ‘letting go’ and ‘holding on’, or ‘hollowing out’ and ‘filling in’ (Matthews, 2013, 2016; see also Warner *et al.* 2023) speaks to a centripetal-centrifugal dynamic through which central government has sought to maintain or (re)centralise decision-making powers in various ways within a governing landscape that has fragmented over 40+ years, whilst also dealing with a lack of capacity to coordinate, implement and deliver such decisions. In this context, a picture of a centre seeking to retain and reassert *decision-making power* without *the capacity to implement or deliver* emerges.

### **Power without capacity? Tracing centralisation and fragmentation**

At first glance, the centralisation and fragmentation schools appear to have conflicting perspectives on the nature, scope, and evolution of the centre of UK politics. The first stresses that power remains

asymmetrical and concentrated within central government, whereas the second claims that the ‘hollowing out of the state’ has dispersed power among a complex network of actors and institutions, including non-governmental actors and territorial units above and below the nation-state. However, in highlighting their gradual convergence, this review of UK governance literature has sought to articulate how these perspectives have been, and can continue to be, productively synthesised.

Specifically, we identify a tacit convergence around three elements: 1) the continued dominance of central government decision-making; 2) the importance of resource dependencies between government and other policy actors; and, 3) the increasing fragmentation of policy delivery and frontline capacity. We suggest, therefore, that questions about the role, capacity and effectiveness of the centre can be more fruitfully addressed through recognition of a continuous, contingent and uneven centripetal-centrifugal dynamic between a highly centralised political authority (the power-hoarding centre), and a wider system that remains fragmented due to the various degrees of influence and power held by intersecting hubs and spokes across the political and economic landscape.

We propose that these processes are effectively captured by the notion of ‘power without capacity’. At this stage it is important to clarify what we mean by this phrase. Firstly, we are not making any grand claims of originality. As outlined earlier, recent research has used similar terminology (e.g., incoherent state, governance gap etc.) to describe the dynamics of centralisation and fragmentation across the UK public policy landscape (e.g., Flinders and Huggins 2021; Richards *et al.* 2023). Rather, we find it a useful way of conceptualising the contradictory character of the trends identified by these scholars. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that some may judge the phrase to be a contradiction in terms given extensive debates as to whether *power is a capacity* and *whether such a capacity must be exercised to constitute power*. Though we do not wish to intervene in these debates, it is important to note that we are referring to ‘power’ in this instance as the *decision-making power* of the centre and ‘capacity’ as the ability of the centre to *implement or deliver* policy. Here, Mann’s distinction between ‘despotic’ and ‘infrastructural’ power is useful in clarifying how the decision-making power of the centre might be refurbished while its capacity to deliver is depleted. Mann (1984: 188-89) defined the former as ‘the range of actions the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalised negotiation with civil society groups’, and the latter as ‘the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm’. By grounding the notion of ‘power without capacity’ in Mann’s framework, we contend that moves to (further) limit negotiation in decision-making constitute attempts to enhance the centre’s ‘despotic power’, whilst examples of the inability to implement policy throughout the system demonstrate declining ‘infrastructural power’ or state *capacity* (Richards *et al.* 2023; Evemy & Parker n.d.).

The empirical discussion below depicts this landscape of centralised power and fragmented capacity. To provide a dynamic account of how power shifts across the UK's patchwork of political institutions, we distinguish between processes of centralisation and fragmentation *within central government* – between departments and 'the core of the core' (No. 10 and coordinating units such as the Cabinet Office and Treasury; see Smith 1999; Mullens-Burgess 2020) – and *between central government and the political system beyond it* (Ward & Ward 2023).

The fragmentation of powers since the late 1970s-1980s has significantly weakened the centre's capacity to operationalise its own policies. The Thatcher-Major years were largely characterised by centralised decision-making, despite successive hits to the latter's authority reversing some of these trends (Kavanagh & Seldon 2000). Yet the increasing exposure of the public sector to private forces instigated significant fragmentation, creating opportunities for accumulation through privatisation and new public management in policy delivery. The New Labour governments further diffused power through extensive constitutional reform comprising devolution, Bank of England independence, the Human Rights Act, and the extension of judicial review through creation of the Supreme Court. The UK's fraught integration into an expanding EU also saw sovereignty pooled across policy areas including agriculture, trade, the environment, and immigration. In terms of the relationship between the core executive and the wider political system, the creation of new centres of power in the devolved territories presented a significant challenge to the unitary state and parliamentary sovereignty, eventuating in new sources of legislative authority. The proliferation of QUANGOs, NDPBs and other private-public partnerships constituted a new 'regulatory state' (Moran 2003). Fragmentation continued under the Coalition through the growth of regional combined authorities and mayoralities, along with new bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Emerging scholarship on Covid-19 highlights how the pandemic illuminated the impact of restrictions to public expenditure and declining state capacity on the UK's capability to deliver public services. Jones and Hameiri (2021) illustrate how the fragmentation of authority and state capacity instilled by neoliberalism explains the UK's poor record during the pandemic. This is rooted in a system which dispersed 'responsibility across a poorly coordinated, fragmented and decentralised array of public and private entities...failing to ensure the provision of concrete state capacities' (Jones and Hameiri, 2021: 9-10; also, Diamond and Laffin 2022). Similarly, public policy scholars have documented how the pandemic 'ruthlessly exposed' the fragmented and frail state of public service provision, presenting a wider account of how devolution has 'heightened fragmentation' across the UK (Elliott *et al.* 2022: 100; 104). This lack of capacity is epitomised by the increasing resort to Military Aid to the Civilian Authorities (MACA), which not only increased markedly during the pandemic but has been increasingly

called upon since 2022, to break strikes across the public sector, manage immigration, and in response to rising conflict within the Metropolitan Police (Brooke-Holland 2022).

Against this backdrop of increased fragmentation, a complex picture of continued centralisation has also been evident. Examining the ‘British policy style’, Jeremy Richardson (2018) argues that several shifts in UK policymaking dating back to Thatcher – including the ‘austerity turn’, the shift towards a more public, confrontational and impositional approach to reform, and the growing power of ministers over civil servants – have contributed to the (re)emergence of a more traditional, hierarchical style of *government* and a stronger centre (also Richards and Smith 2015). Richardson notes that consultation has become increasingly constrained and stage-managed to minimise deliberation. Though the Thatcher administration(s) instigated reforms which fragmented delivery, internal decision-making power was centralised through the isolation of Cabinet and the growing influence of Special Advisers (SPADs), whilst externally, local government autonomy was curtailed. Similarly, New Labour extended the role of the private sector and devolved responsibilities outside the executive through its constitutional reform programme, whilst simultaneously pursuing a ‘paradoxical’ process of internal centralisation, with the powers of No. 10 and the Cabinet Office enhanced and Cabinet once again marginalised (Flinders 2010). A yet more complex picture emerged under the Cameron governments, as despite the prioritisation of combined authorities and a wider agenda of ‘localism’, local authorities, QUANGOs and NDPBs suffered extensive cuts through austerity (Lowndes & Gardner 2016), and the government sought to strengthen the capacity of the Cabinet Office to coordinate and control the spending of government departments and NDPBs (Dommett and Flinders 2015).

This argument has been echoed in the context of Brexit by scholars who have noted how narratives surrounding the UK’s departure from the EU have been used to bolster the BPT. These accounts contest whether the levels of fragmentation highlighted by scholars of MLG and the DPM ever obtained, arguing that the reforms of the Thatcher and New Labour governments accommodated, rather than replaced, the BPT (Hall *et al.* 2018: 378). The emphasis on repatriation of powers and reasserting parliamentary sovereignty epitomised by the mantra ‘take back control’ arguably laid the ground for entrenchment of ‘the centralising, power-hoarding tendencies associated with the BPT’ and encapsulated the governing strategies of the May and Johnson administrations (Richards *et al.* 2019: 345). Scholars have also noted how Brexit revived central civil service recruitment to return some of the capacity eroded by austerity and the gradual ‘hollowing out’ (Ward 2021), as well as reinvigorating core components of the WM in terms of parliament-executive relations (Baldini *et al.* 2022). Patrick Diamond (2022) has identified patterns in core executive politics which echo Richardson’s account, arguing that the Coalition presided over a shift away from mutual dependence between ministers and civil servants and the emergence of a more conflictual ‘*them and us*’ model. Further evidence of this

dynamic continues to emerge, as prominent public rifts between ministers and senior civil servants have proliferated in a manner incongruous to traditional notions of ‘impartiality’ (Thomas 2023).

Whilst many have noted that the impulse of post-2016 governments has been a centralising one, therefore, the principal targets of this process of centralisation are institutions introduced as part of New Labour’s constitutional reforms. Departure from the EU itself constituted a removal of one layer of MLG amidst demands to ‘take back control’, and the Johnson government’s marginalisation of devolved administrations during the Brexit process constituted an attack on another, with the Internal Market Act 2020 marking a particular flashpoint due to the constraints it placed on resource allocation within the devolved administrations. Successive post-2016 Supreme Court interventions have bolstered the political, legal, and intellectual case – particularly amongst those who favoured Brexit – for a recentralisation of powers and a return to the pre-New Labour ‘political’ constitution in the name of bolstering parliamentary sovereignty (Johnson & Zhu 2023). The continued prominence of judicial review in day-to-day politics, particularly regarding immigration and home affairs, has spurred hostility towards domestic courts, the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights, prompting several pieces of legislation throughout 2022-23. The Truss government’s ‘dash for growth’ and the broader (re)politicisation of the Bank of England triggered by the 2021-23 inflationary spike was also underpinned by a narrative of centralisation and reinstating the traditional constitution.

Three points are worth noting from this necessarily broad-brush discussion. Firstly, many of the sites of power subject to challenge by the executive were either created or strengthened by governance reforms since the 1980s. In particular, the institutions established by the New Labour governments have provided new ‘sites of possible contention’ that have been targeted by both direct and indirect attempts to recentralise power within central government (Ward & Ward 2023: 1177). Therefore, the reassertion of the centre in the post-2016 context could be read as a partial attempt to return to the *status quo ante*, well within the spirit of the WM and BPT (see Sandford 2023). Secondly, the centre’s recent attempts to assert its authority over institutions such as the courts and devolved governments have met limited success because of the potential for contestation or resistance from these new sites of power. Indeed, many of these institutions achieved greater public profile during Brexit and the pandemic, demonstrating that fragmentation may have altered public expectations of territorial governance over the long term (Ward & Ward 2023: 1186-1187). As noted by various metagovernance scholars, therefore, the intensification of contradictory centrifugal-centripetal pressures has created a ‘pathological’ situation in which the centre struggles to retain ‘steering’ capacity over policy delivery yet continues to hold on – and indeed seek to extend – decision-making power (Gaskell *et al.* 2021). Finally, the potential for contestation across the multi-level system has filtered into the party system. Dual processes of centralisation and fragmentation present various devolution dilemmas for party-

political actors. For example, should Scottish Labour seek greater autonomy from the statewide Labour Party, or should they seek to gain more influence at Westminster (Brown Swan & Kenny 2024)? Similar questions have arisen and continue to pertain to local and regional mayoral contexts.

#### **Conclusion: Understanding UK politics today**

The proliferation of crises which have followed the 2016 EU referendum have generated questions about the continued relevance of extant frameworks for analysing UK politics, and even about the merits of the sub-discipline in general. Territorial differentiation is to the fore of these debates, with scholars highlighting how the field was blinded to the 2016 referendum result at least in-part due to a 'British Politics' tradition that has veiled trends distinctive to England by taking Britain 'unreflectingly as its unit of analysis' (Henderson *et al.* 2017: 644). Moreover, the re-emergence of intractable political conflict in Northern Ireland has highlighted the significance of unconsciously short-handling UK Politics to 'British Politics', with the failure to consider the implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland exemplifying how the territory is marginalised in both academic and everyday political discourse (Murphy and Evershed 2022). The post-2016 period has thus seen calls to treat English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish politics as discrete units of analysis which are equally shaped by their own distinct political traditions, electoral circumstances and cultural heritages (Wright 2020; Henderson and Wyn Jones 2021). Furthermore, the exigency of reframing academic disciplines from the perspective of decolonisation raises further questions for the field, particularly in relation to oft-cited categories such as 'white working class' and its association with the Brexit vote (Shilliam 2018; Begum *et al.*, 2021).

In introducing the notion of 'power without capacity' we hope to draw attention to the tensions which characterise contemporary UK politics. The phrase describes a dual dynamic of centralisation-fragmentation, in which the centre continually seeks to assert control over policy decisions it is democratically accountable for, in a differentiated policy landscape in which responsibility for coordination and delivery is diffused across multiple actors and institutions, undermining central state capacity. This reframing aims to assist new students and researchers of UK politics through the rediscovery of evergreen issues in public policy, such as the gap between dominant ideas of policymaking and policy practice, as well as illustrating how recent phenomena, such as the failures of pandemic management, can be explained through the co-existence of a persistent, and potentially resurgent BPT and WM, alongside concomitant processes of fragmentation.

In a context of power without capacity, the constraints which governments face arguably enhance the appeal of two strategies. First, the obstacles to delivering policy in the system we have described provide a strong incentive for policymakers to perform authority and decisiveness – in accordance with

the WM – whilst deprioritising delivery. Drawing on another concept conceived in the late 1970s, this potentially increases deployment of ‘placebo policies’ (McConnell 2020). Faced with strong ‘policy traps’ – the gap between public expectations and government capacity to address policy problems – politicians are incentivised to adopt policies designed to ‘show’ citizens and stakeholders’ issues are being addressed rather than to actually address them. McConnell (2020) cites New Labour’s appointment of ‘Drug Tsars’ to tackle the complexities of drug misuse as an example, though the Conservative government’s ‘levelling up agenda’ might provide a more recent incarnation (see Coyle and Muhtar 2023). Second, frustrations arising from persistent centralisation of executive power alongside fragmentation of policy delivery may increase the frequency of calls for governance reform. The framing of power without capacity thus helps to explain contradictory calls for reform that have emerged in the post-Brexit and post-pandemic era. The Labour Party (2022) have proposed sweeping changes, including a commitment to further devolution and an elected second chamber, seeking to redistribute power away from Westminster and reduce regional inequality. Alternatively, the Conservative Party have implemented reforms which have empowered cabinet ministers and streamlined central government. Despite the incentives to pursue either placebo policies or reform, both have limitations, not least that placebos fail when the public see through them, and substantive reform tends to be deprioritised after electoral success. However, an appreciation of the tensions arising from a centre which hoards decision-making power but lacks the capacity to deliver policy is a prerequisite for assessing the relative merits of government attempts to reconcile these tensions.

## References

- Akram, S. (2023) ‘Dear British politics—where is the race and racism?’, *British Politics* [Preprint].
- Bache, I., Bartle, I. and Flinders, M. (2016) ‘Multi-level governance’, in *Handbook on Theories of Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 486–498.
- Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (2004) ‘Multi-Level Governance and the Study of the British State’, *Public Policy and Administration*, 19(1), pp. 31–51.
- Bailey, D. and Wood, M. (2017) ‘The metagovernance of English devolution’, *Local Government Studies*, 43(6), pp. 966–991.
- Baldini, G., Bressanelli, E. and Massetti, E. (2022) ‘Back to the Westminster model? The Brexit process and the UK political system’, *International Political Science Review*, 43(3), pp. 329–344.



- 497 Barnard, C. (2022) 'Taking back control? Rule by law(s) and the executive in the post-Brexit world',  
498 *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 38(1), pp. 11–26.
- 499 Begum, N., Mondon, A., Winter, A. (2021) 'Between the "left behind" and "the people": racism,  
500 populism and the construction of the "white working class" in the context of Brexit', in S. Hunter, C.  
501 van der Westhuizen (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- 502 Bell, S. and Hindmoor, A. (2009) *Rethinking Governance: The Centrality of the State in Modern Society*.  
503 Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- 504 Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R. (2003) *Interpreting British Governance*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- 505 Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2006) 'Interpretive Approaches to British Government and Politics',  
506 *British Politics*, 1(1), pp. 84–112.
- 507 Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2008) 'The Differentiated Polity as Narrative', *The British Journal of*  
508 *Politics and International Relations*, 10(4), pp. 729–734.
- 509 Birch, A.H. (1964) *Representative and Responsible Government*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- 510 Brooke-Holland, L. (2023) 'Deploying the armed forces in the UK'. Available at:  
511 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9601/> (Accessed: 22 December 2023).
- 512 Brown Swan, C. and Kenny M. (2024) "'We Can't Afford to be a Branch Office": The Territorial Dynamics  
513 of the British Labour Party, 2015-2019', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 77 (1), pp. 109-128
- 514 Cairney, P. (2012) *Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issues*. Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York:  
515 Palgrave Macmillan.
- 516 Cairney, P. (2022) 'The myth of "evidence-based policymaking" in a decentred state', *Public Policy and*  
517 *Administration*, 37(1), pp. 46–66.
- 518 Cairney, P., Heikkilä, T. and Wood, M. (2019) *Making Policy in a Complex World*. Cambridge: Cambridge  
519 University Press.
- 520 Coyle, D. and Muhtar, A. (2023) 'Levelling up policies and the failure to learn', *Contemporary Social*  
521 *Science*, 18 (3-4), pp 406-427
- 522 Diamond, P. (2023) 'Core Executive Politics in the Cameron Era, 2010–16: The Dynamics of Whitehall  
523 Reform', *Government and Opposition*, 58, pp 516-534
- 524 Diamond, P. and Laffin, M. (2022) 'The United Kingdom and the pandemic: problems of central control  
525 and coordination', *Local Government Studies*, 48(2), pp. 211–231.
- 526 Dommett, K. and Flinders, M. (2015) 'The Centre Strikes Back: Meta-Governance, Delegation, and the  
527 Core Executive in the United Kingdom, 2010–14', *Public Administration*, 93(1), pp. 1–16.
- 528 Dorey, P. (2020) 'The Core Executive', in M. Garnett (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of British Politics*  
529 *and Society*. Abingdon: Routledge (Routledge International Handbooks), pp. 9–25.
- 530 Dunleavy, P. and Rhodes, R. a. W. (1990) 'Core Executive Studies in Britain', *Public Administration*, 68(1),  
531 pp. 3–28.
- 532 Dunleavy, P. (2018) '5.2 The core executive and government', in P. Dunleavy, A. Park, and R. Taylor (eds)  
533 *The UK's Changing Democracy: The 2018 Democratic Audit*. LSE Press, pp. 204–222.
- 534 Elgie, R. (2011) 'Core Executive Studies Two Decades On', *Public Administration*, 89(1), pp. 64–77.
- 535 Elliott, I.C. et al. (2022) 'The fragmentation of public administration: Differentiated and decentered  
536 governance in the (dis)United Kingdom', *Public Administration*, 100(1), pp. 98–115.

- 537 Evemy, J. and Parker, S. (n.d.) 'Command But No Control: the Despotic and Infrastructural Powers of  
538 UK Immigration Policy after Brexit', Working Paper.
- 539 Flinders, M. (2010) *Democratic Drift: Majoritarian Modification and Democratic Anomie in the United*  
540 *Kingdom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 541 Flinders, M. and Huggins, C. (2021) 'Modes of State Governance, Populist Pressures and Public Sector  
542 Reform', in J. Connolly and A. van der Zwet (eds) *Public Value Management, Governance and Reform*  
543 *in Britain*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (International Series on Public Policy), pp. 87–114.
- 544 Flinders, M. *et al.* (2022) "'Stretched But Not Snapped": A Response to Russell and Serban on Retiring  
545 the "Westminster Model"', *Government and Opposition*, 57(2), pp. 353–369.
- 546 Gamble, A. (1990) 'Theories of British Politics', *Political Studies*, 38(3), pp. 404–420.
- 547 Gaskell, J. *et al.* (2020) 'Covid-19 and the Blunders of our Governments: Long-run System Failings  
548 Aggravated by Political Choices', *The Political Quarterly*, 91(3), pp. 523–533.
- 549 Geddes, M. (2019) 'The Explanatory Potential of "Dilemmas": Bridging Practices and Power to  
550 Understand Political Change in Interpretive Political Science', *Political Studies Review*, 17(3), pp. 239–  
551 254.
- 552 Hall, M. (2011) *Political Traditions and UK Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 553 Hall, M., Marsh, D. and Vines, E. (2018) 'A changing democracy: contemporary challenges to the British  
554 political tradition', *Policy Studies*, 39(4), pp. 365–382.
- 555 Harmes, A. (2006) 'Neoliberalism and Multilevel Governance', *Review of International Political*  
556 *Economy*, 13(5), pp. 725–749.
- 557 Henderson, A. *et al.* (2017) 'How Brexit was made in England', *The British Journal of Politics and*  
558 *International Relations*, 19(4), pp. 631–646.
- 559 Henderson, A. and Jones, R.W. (2021) *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain*. Oxford:  
560 Oxford University Press.
- 561 Hood, C. (2011) *The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-Preservation in Government*. Princeton,  
562 NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 563 Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003) 'Unraveling the Central State, but How? Types of Multi-level  
564 Governance', *American Political Science Review*, 97(2), pp. 233–243.
- 565 Jessop, B. (2016) 'Territory, Politics, Governance and Multispatial Metagovernance', *Territory, Politics,*  
566 *Governance*, 4(1), pp. 8–32.
- 567 Johnson, R. and Zhu, Y.Y. (eds) (2023) *Sceptical Perspectives on the Changing Constitution of the United*  
568 *Kingdom*. Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- 569 Jones, L. and Hameiri, S. (2021) 'COVID-19 and the failure of the neoliberal regulatory state', *Review of*  
570 *International Political Economy*, 0(0), pp. 1–25.
- 571 Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (2000) *The Powers Behind the Prime Minister: The Hidden Influence of*  
572 *Number Ten*. London: HarperCollins UK.
- 573 The Labour Party (2022) A New Britain: Renewing Our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy.  
574 Available at: [Commission-on-the-UKs-Future.pdf \(labour.org.uk\)](#)
- 575 Lijphart, A. (2012) *Patterns of Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- 576 Lowndes, V. and Gardner, A. (2016) 'Local governance under the Conservatives: super-austerity,  
577 devolution and the "smarter state"', *Local Government Studies*, 42(3), pp. 357–375.
- 578 Mann, M. (1984) 'The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results', *European*  
579 *Journal of Sociology*, 25(2), pp. 185–213.
- 580 Marsh, D. (2011) 'The New Orthodoxy: The Differentiated Polity Model', *Public Administration*, 89(1),  
581 pp. 32–48.
- 582 Marsh, D., Richards, D. and Smith, M.J. (2001) *Changing patterns of governance in the United Kingdom:*  
583 *reinventing Whitehall?* Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave
- 584 Marsh, D., Richards, D. and Smith, M. (2003) 'Unequal Plurality: Towards an Asymmetric Power Model  
585 of British Politics', *Government and Opposition*, 38(3), pp. 306–332.
- 586 Marinetto, M. (2003) 'Governing beyond the Centre: A Critique of the Anglo-Governance School',  
587 *Political Studies*, 51(3), pp. 592–608.
- 588 Matthews, F. (2013) *Complexity, Fragmentation, and Uncertainty: Government Capacity in an Evolving*  
589 *State*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- 590 Matthews, F.M. (2016) 'Letting go and holding on: The politics of performance management in the  
591 United Kingdom', *Public Policy and Administration*, 31(4), pp. 303–323.
- 592 McConnell, A. (2020) 'The use of placebo policies to escape from policy traps', *Journal of European*  
593 *Public Policy*, 27 (7), pp. 957–976
- 594 Morphet, J. (2021) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Devolution: Recentralising the British State Beyond*  
595 *Brexit?* Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- 596 Mullens-Burgess, E. (2020) 'Cabinet Office', *Institute for Government*, 21 September. Available at:  
597 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/cabinet-office> (Accessed: 30 December 2023).
- 598 Murphy, M.C. and Evershed, J. (2022) 'Contesting sovereignty and borders: Northern Ireland,  
599 devolution and the Union', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 10(5), pp. 661–677.
- 600 Newman, J. et al. (2023) 'Mechanisms of metagovernance as structural challenges to levelling up in  
601 England', *Regional Studies*, 0(0), pp. 1–17.
- 602 Osborne, D. and Gaebler, T. (1993) *Reinventing Government: The Five Strategies for Reinventing*  
603 *Government*. London: Penguin.
- 604 Ostrom, E. (2010) 'Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems',  
605 *The American Economic Review*, 100(3), pp. 641–672.
- 606 Rhodes, R.A.W. (1995) 'From Prime Ministerial Power to Core Executive', in R.A.W. Rhodes and P.  
607 Dunleavy (eds) *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*. Basingstoke: MacMillan, pp. 11–37.
- 608 Rhodes, R.A.W. (1997) *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and*  
609 *Accountability*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- 610 Rhodes, R.A.W. (2017) *Network Governance and the Differentiated Polity: Selected Essays, Volume I*.  
611 Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 612 Richards, D., Diamond, P. and Wager, A. (2019) 'Westminster's Brexit Paradox: The contingency of the  
613 "old" versus "new" politics', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21(2), pp. 330–  
614 348.

- 615 Richards, D. and Smith, M.J. (2015) 'Devolution in England, the British Political Tradition and the  
616 Absence of Consultation, Consensus and Consideration', *Representation*, 51(4), pp. 385–401.
- 617 Richards, D. *et al.* (2023) 'Crisis and state transformation: Covid-19, levelling up and the UK's  
618 incoherent state', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 16(1), pp. 31–48.
- 619 Richardson, J.J. and Jordan, A.G. (1979) *Governing under pressure: the policy process in a post-  
620 parliamentary democracy*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- 621 Richardson, J. (2018) 'The Changing British Policy Style: From Governance to Government?', *British  
622 Politics*, 13(2), pp. 215–233.
- 623 Russell, M. and Gover, D. (2017) *Legislation at Westminster: Parliamentary Actors and Influence in the  
624 Making of British Law*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- 625 Sandford, M. (2023) "'Muscular Unionism': The British Political Tradition Strikes Back?", *Political  
626 Studies* [online first]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217231176474>
- 627 Shaw, R. and Eichbaum, C. (2014) 'Ministers, Minders and the Core Executive: Why Ministers Appoint  
628 Political Advisers in Westminster Contexts', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 67(3), pp. 584–616.
- 629 Shilliam, R. (2018) *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit*. Newcastle Upon Tyne:  
630 Agenda Publishing.
- 631 Smith, M.J. (1999) *The Core Executive in Britain*. Houndmills: MacMillan.
- 632 Smith, M.J., Marsh, D. and Richards, D. (1995) 'From Prime Ministerial Power to Core Executive', in  
633 R.A.W. Rhodes and P. Dunleavy (eds) *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*. Basingstoke:  
634 MacMillan, pp. 38–62.
- 635 Sørensen, E. and Torfing, J. (2009) 'Making Governance Networks Effective and Democratic Through  
636 Metagovernance', *Public Administration*, 87(2), pp. 234–258.
- 637 Thomas, A. (2023) 'Appointed on merit: the value of an impartial civil service', *Institute for  
638 Government*, 24 May. Available at: [https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/civil-  
639 service-impartiality](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/civil-service-impartiality) (Accessed: 30 December 2023).
- 640 Ward, J.W. (2021) 'Reasserting the Centre: The Brexit Doctrine and the Imperative Mandate in British  
641 Politics', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 74(4), pp. 890–910.
- 642 Ward, J. and Ward, B. (2023) 'From Brexit to COVID-19: The Johnson Government, Executive  
643 Centralisation and Authoritarian Populism', *Political Studies*, 71(4), pp. 1171–1189.
- 644 Warner, S. *et al.* (2021) 'English Devolution and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Governing Dilemmas in the  
645 Shadow of the Treasury', *The Political Quarterly*, 92(2), pp. 321–330.
- 646 Warner, S., Richards, D. and Smith, M. (2023) 'The United Kingdom: permanent revolution or muddling  
647 through?', in S.F. Goldfinch (ed.) *Handbook of Public Administration Reform*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar  
648 Publishing, pp. 311–329.
- 649 Wright, T. (2020) *British Politics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.