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

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

2   ───

3   This article explores the question of how to conceptualise the location, capacity, and effectiveness of

4   the 'centre' in the UK policymaking process. Whilst literature on UK governance has historically

5   featured avid disagreements about the power and capacity of central government, we identify a more

6   recent convergence around the idea that UK government is characterised by persistent centralisation

7   of decision-making alongside a fragmentation of policy delivery and frontline capacity. Through a

8   detailed review of UK governance debates we trace the development of two, seemingly contradictory,

9   schools of thought: the centralisation school and the fragmentation school. We then identify an

10 emerging consensus which recognises a continuous and uneven centripetal-centrifugal dynamic and

11 the concurrence of both centralisation and fragmentation. We contend that changes to the British

12 political context following the 2016 EU referendum buttress the claim that UK politics is shaped by

13 twin processes of centralisation and fragmentation, reinforcing tensions between a centre that desires

14 power and a range of forces eroding its capacity to deliver. Our overall contention is that the notion of

15 'power without capacity' effectively captures the contemporary character of the 'centre'.

16 ───

17 A longstanding puzzle for students and scholars of UK politics is how to comprehend a governing

18 landscape characterised by the coexistence of a centralised state that persistently hoards power, and

19 a public policy context characterised by complexity, fragmentation, and implementation gaps. Whilst

20 for much of the 20th century the field was dominated by the precepts of the Westminster Model (WM)

21 and the recognition that the British state was highly centralised, from the 1970s scholars began to

22 highlight the gap between the WM image and policymaking reality. In tandem with the advent of

23 neoliberalism, such scholarship prompted a new school of thought which contended that the power

24 of central government was becoming increasingly fragmented. Under the banner of 'governance', this

25 school advanced a pluralist interpretation of UK politics emphasising the diffusion of power across

26 multi-levelled structures, both vertically (to supranational/international organisations and

27 local/devolved government) and horizontally (to NGOs, arms-length bodies, and private actors)

28 (Rhodes 1997). This perspective became increasingly influential in both the UK and further afield and

29 was described as the 'new orthodoxy' by the 2000s (Marsh 2011). However, continuity of the central

30 tenets of the British system led many to reject this account. Asymmetries and hierarchies of power, it

31 was countered, continued to characterise a system dominated by the institutions of Westminster and

32 Whitehall, epitomised by the notion that 'central government knows best' (Marsh *et al.* 2003).

33   Given this divergence in the literature, how should new students and researchers seek to make sense

34   of contemporary UK politics? We offer two contributions on the role of the 'centre' in UK politics to

35   help answer this question. Firstly, we review and compare different models of UK governance to shed

36   light on the development of two, seemingly incompatible, schools of thought – the 'centralisation

37   school' and the 'fragmentation school'. We present a new reading of these debates, highlighting points

38   of convergence initially within the core executive studies literature and more recently within debates

39   around 'metagovernance'. This narrative reveals a growing consensus that UK politics is characterised

40   by a centripetal-centrifugal dynamic which creates tensions between a power-hoarding centre and a

41   range of forces gradually eroding its capacity to deliver. Secondly, through an assessment of recent

42   empirical developments, we introduce the notion of 'power without capacity' to frame these tensions.

43   Whilst the gap between policy intent and policy implementation has long been acknowledged in the

44   literature, we contend that this framing adds weight to the idea that UK central government retains its

45   thirst for power yet suffers an increasing inability to deliver many of its key objectives.

46

Centralisation *or* fragmentation of the British state?

48   In their account of the governance dynamics surrounding Covid-19 and the putative 'levelling-up'

49   programme of the post-2019 Conservative administrations, Richards *et al.* (2023: 45) argue that these

50   cases illustrate how, in the UK, 'the state is centralised in terms of power but fragmented in relation to

51   public administration and policy delivery'. Similarly, in their analysis of the levelling-up agenda,

52   Newman *et al*. (2023: 14) list multiple governing problems resulting from the devolution strategies of

53   successive administrations which have worked to reinforce the UK's 'centralised statism' alongside

54   'fragmentation of local remits and responsibilities'. Elsewhere, Jones and Hameiri's (2021: 17)

55   comparison of the UK's pandemic management to South Korea reveals how the British state's

56   outsourcing-dependency has produced policy outcomes which are 'simultaneously hyper-centralised

57   and yet highly fragmented and ineffective'. Likewise, Flinders and Huggins (2021) have contrasted the

58   idea of 'representative and responsible' government – central to the WM – with the increasingly

59   'complex reality of governance', creating a 'governance gap' between public expectations of politicians

60   control and growing constraints on their ability to effect change.

61   A picture of 'incoherence' then, to borrow Richards *et al.*'s terminology, has emerged across the

62   literature on UK governance. This emerging consensus, we contend, centres on recognition of: 1) a

63   continued dominance of central government decision-making; 2) the importance of resource

64   dependencies between government and other policy actors; and, 3) the increasing fragmentation of

65   policy delivery and frontline capacity. In the following sections, we chart the lineage(s) of this view of

66   a centralised but fragmented state, tracing its trajectory from within two distinct and seemingly

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

74 **Core Executive Studies**

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

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

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

100 by 'ministers who are key actors within the institutions of the core executive' (also see Smith *et al.*
101 1995). More recently, Dorey (2020) updated the definition to include special advisers and junior
102 ministers, whilst Dunleavy (2018: 205) included the 'Bank of England' as a key actor within the core
103 executive. Though the appreciation of contingency and change is a merit of this approach, such broad
104 definitions arguably sacrifice some of the initial conceptual clarity.

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

113

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

115 *The Westminster Model*

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

---

[1] 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).

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

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

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

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

163 within a fundamentally asymmetrical system: 'The core executive is segmented, but even so, the key

164 resources in the system lie with the PM and the Chancellor' (Marsh *et al*. 2003: 308). The alternative

165 'Asymmetric Power Model' (APM) argued that an understanding of external networks should not

166 replace a primary focus on central government and relations between actors *within* it – especially

167 departments and coordinating units – and between the centre and external political institutions (see

168 Smith *et al.* 1995; Smith 1999).

169 The APM also emphasised the interplay between structures and ideas. On the former, the APM insisted

170 UK politics was shaped by patterns of 'structured inequality' in terms of who held key positions in

171 government, and that these inequalities were representative of broader socio-economic inequalities

172 (Marsh *et al.* 2003: 309-10). On the latter, the framework built on Marsh's earlier work on the

173 prevalence of a singular, elitist British Political Tradition (BPT) (Marsh *et al.* 2001; Hall 2011). Drawing

174 from Birch (1964), Marsh argued that dominant ideas about democracy and political practice in the UK

175 convey a limited notion of 'representation' and a conservative notion of 'responsibility', thereby

176 cementing a model of hierarchical, centralised and largely secretive government remarkably resistant

177 to change. This tradition legitimises concentration of executive power in central government – i.e.,

178 Whitehall – with even parliament limited in its ability to enforce executive accountability (Barnard

179 2022; Hall *et al.*, 2018: 367-8).

180 The APM and BPT both build on core executive studies' focus on the centre while incorporating the

181 concept of 'resource dependency' to move beyond the rigid, 'zero-sum' conception of power resting

182 within institutions implied by the WM. However, this work sits firmly within the centralisation school

183 as it emphasises how, despite multiple phases of reform, accommodation rather than replacement of

184 the BPT ensured elements of the core executive retained considerably more power over the

185 policymaking process than other parts of the political system.

186

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

188 *From the Differentiated Polity to Decentred Governance*

189 In contrast to the BPT and the WM, Rhodes (1997) extended the idea of resource-dependency to

190 articulate the more pluralist DPM. Its central premise was that centralised 'government' control over

191 policy has been displaced by a more fragmented and complex system of 'governance' across multiple

192 networks. The 'hollowing out of the state' initiated by the Thatcher and Major governments,

193 particularly through contracting out and privatisation of public services, significantly altered the

194 character of UK governance. Britain's unitary state became 'differentiated' as power moved upwards,

195 downwards, and sideways to multiple institutions and policy actors. The centre was increasingly

196   segmented within this system of 'governance', with central governments finding it difficult to 'steer'

197   and coordinate policy, let alone adopt a more hands-on 'rowing' approach (Osborne and Gaebler

198   1993). This led Rhodes to conclude that the government retained power to set the direction of travel

199   for policy but relinquished much of the capacity to implement it (Rhodes 1995: 30-31).

200   Rhodes's initial iteration of the DPM preserved some role for structural constraints and acknowledged

201   the 'asymmetric' nature of central-local government relations (Rhodes 1997: 17; Marsh *et al.* 2001:

202   9). However, as this work progressed in a more interpretivist direction structural factors were

203   disavowed as 'unhelpfully vague' (Bevir & Rhodes 2008: 730). Bevir and Rhodes subsequently sought

204   to '*decentre governance*' through a 'focus on the social construction of policy networks through the

205   ability of individuals to create meanings'. In refuting the idea of a dominant British political tradition,

206   they instead emphasised the existence of multiple, discrete *traditions* in UK politics, redirecting focus

207   away from formal institutions which were deemed to be limited by 'modernist empiricism or

208   positivism'. Instead, the focus shifted towards the role of multiple actors and traditions in developing

209   a 'contingent pattern of rule through conflicting actions' (Bevir & Rhodes 2006: 98). This focus on

210   'meaning in action' was operationalised through deployment of ethnographic and dilemma-based

211   methods (see Geddes 2019), which, whilst retaining elements of core executive studies' framework,

212   were generally more interested in the centrifugal impulse drawing power away from the centre.

213   *Multi-level governance*

214   Originating in the field of European Union (EU) studies, the notion of 'multi-level governance' (MLG)

215   became something of a mantra across political science and public policy from the 1990s-2000s. The

216   term referred to the complex arrangements of cooperation and negotiation between public

217   institutions in the construction and implementation of policy (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). The 'multi-

218   level' aspect referred to the overlapping levels of territorial power at different regional, supranational,

219   and international tiers, whilst 'governance' referred to the horizontal displacement of the policy-

220   making powers of central government to a broad range of non-state actors, including private

221   businesses and NGOs (Harmes 2006). The field echoes elements of the DPM, particularly through the

222   emphasis on 'governance' over government, reflecting the observation that national governments

223   have lost a significant degree of control over the policy process, with power dispersed to a multiple

224   range of actors throughout this vast multi-tiered system (see Bache and Flinders 2004).

225   As a result, this work challenges 'mono-centric' state-focused perspectives, contending that the

226   'reallocation of authority upward, downward and sideways' (Hooghe and Marks 2003: 233) resulted

227   in a system of 'polycentric governance'. This latter term connotes 'many centers of decision making

228   that are formally independent of each other', though functions may overlap in certain cases (Ostrom

229   *et al.*, cited in Ostrom 2010: 643; see also Bache *et al*. 2016)*.* However, the divisions which emerged

230   from core executive studies are replicated in the MLG literature. Some scholars emphasise the

231   continued role of structural power, hierarchy and the continued dominance of the centre, as well as

232   the extent to which resource dependency and exchange relationships have grown or developed over

233   time (Marinetto 2003). Others from the field of public policy, such as Paul Cairney (2022), have built

234   on Rhodes's framework of decentred analysis to highlight how the dispersal of power across multiple

235   centres restricts UK central government actors' ability to fulfil the WM narrative of strong, central

236   government control. In this sense, Cairney *et al.* (2019) have noted how – within public policy in

237   particular – the influence of MLG has contributed to poly- or 'multi-centric' policymaking representing

238   the 'conventional wisdom' (Cairney 2022: 52).

239   This highlights the centrality of MLG scholarship to the 'fragmentation school' in UK politics,

240   particularly through the influence of policy studies. However, it also speaks to a normative divergence

241   between scholars who view devolutionary shifts positively and those who are sceptical. On the one

242   hand, plural and decentralized policy networks are said to reflect the heterogeneous preferences of

243   citizens, disperse power to a range of actors, and facilitate flexibility, innovation, and experimentation.

244   On the other, MLG obscures lines of accountability and undermines the authority of publicly elected

245   democratic bodies, creating opportunities for 'blame-shifting' (Hood 2011). This has become

246   particularly pronounced in the UK post-2016, with Brexit, Covid-19 management and the 'Levelling-

247   Up' agenda entrenching such divisions and replacing the outdated normative biases behind the WM

248   with alternative assumptions that central government is opaque and ineffective, and devolved

249   government is the opposite (Morphet 2021; Richards *et al.* 2023).

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

251   As noted above, implicit within the DPM and MLG literature is the notion that central governments no

252   longer have the capacity to fully implement policy and deliver services and are instead confined to

253   'steering' policy coordination and implementation. System(s) of governance have become so

254   fragmented and complex that government attempts to steer policymaking must operate at different

255   levels and sometimes over different policy areas concurrently. The concept of 'metagovernance'

256   emerged in response to this context. Broadly defined, metagovernance concerns 'the governance of

257   governance', that is, the means through which central government coordinates 'ground rules for

258   governance and the regulatory order in and through which governance partners…pursue their aims'

259   (Jessop 2016: 16; also Sørenson and Torfing 2009).

260   However, within this literature dispute remains as to the purchase the central state can exercise within

261   this complex policymaking landscape. Some reiterate the primacy of the central state and continued

262   asymmetries in policymaking through the notion of 'the shadow of hierarchy' (Bell & Hindmoor 2009;

263   Warner *et al.* 2023), whilst others position the concept within more pluralist forms of networked

264   governance in which the state comprises one (albeit important) actor (Cairney *et al.* 2019). This

265   spectrum of opinion is mirrored to some extent in the range of mechanisms through which

266   metagovernance is said to operate. Bailey and Wood (2017) categorise these into 'hands-on' – direct

267   involvement from the central state in maintaining governance structures and networks – and 'hands-

268   off' – indirect involvement through design and political framing. The divisions which emerged in the

269   context of core executive studies debates in the 1990s-2000s, therefore, continue to influence

270   perspectives on metagovernance. Rhodes's work (2017: Ch. 12), for example, has rejected the

271   (re)prioritisation of the state in much metagovernance scholarship which he deems inconsistent with

272   an interpretivist methodology of 'decentred analysis'.

273   However, we contend that the spectrum of perspectives facilitated by metagovernance scholarship

274   signals the foundations of a convergence between the centralisation and fragmentation schools.

275   Whilst the notion of 'steering rather than rowing' lies at the heart of metagovernance, UK politics

276   scholars have noted how the centre, sometimes referred to as the 'hollow crown' or 'polo-mint hole',

277   seems increasingly incapable not only of delivering policy, but also of coordinating 'at a distance'

278   (Diamond and Laffin 2022: 213; Dommett and Flinders 2015: 2). Though at first glance this might

279   suggest further fragmentation, a substantial seam of scholarship has sought to illuminate how the

280   centre has confronted the complexity of coordinating policy by refurbishing 'core executive capacity

281   and capability' (Shaw and Eichbaum, 2014: 608; Ward and Ward 2023). A pertinent example in the

282   context of austerity is the Cameron government's attempt to strengthen control of an increasingly

283   complex network of non-departmental public bodies (NDPB) by reducing them, as well as increasing

284   the oversight and monitoring powers of both the Cabinet Office and the Treasury (Dommett and

285   Flinders 2015; Warner *et al.* 2021). This balance of 'letting go' and 'holding on', or 'hollowing out' and

286   'filling in' (Matthews, 2013, 2016; see also Warner *et al.* 2023) speaks to a centripetal-centrifugal

287   dynamic through which central government has sought to maintain or (re)centralise decision-making

288   powers in various ways within a governing landscape that has fragmented over 40+ years, whilst also

289   dealing with a lack of capacity to coordinate, implement and deliver such decisions. In this context, a

290   picture of a centre seeking to retain and reassert *decision-making power* without *the capacity to*

291   *implement or deliver* emerges.

292

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

294   At first glance, the centralisation and fragmentation schools appear to have conflicting perspectives on

295   the nature, scope, and evolution of the centre of UK politics. The first stresses that power remains

296   asymmetrical and concentrated within central government, whereas the second claims that the

297   'hollowing out of the state' has dispersed power among a complex network of actors and institutions,

298   including non-governmental actors and territorial units above and below the nation-state. However,

299   in highlighting their gradual convergence, this review of UK governance literature has sought to

300   articulate how these perspectives have been, and can continue to be, productively synthesised.

301   Specifically, we identify a tacit convergence around three elements: 1) the continued dominance of

302   central government decision-making; 2) the importance of resource dependencies between

303   government and other policy actors; and, 3) the increasing fragmentation of policy delivery and

304   frontline capacity. We suggest, therefore, that questions about the role, capacity and effectiveness of

305   the centre can be more fruitfully addressed through recognition of a continuous, contingent and

306   uneven centripetal-centrifugal dynamic between a highly centralised political authority (the power-

307   hoarding centre), and a wider system that remains fragmented due to the various degrees of influence

308   and power held by intersecting hubs and spokes across the political and economic landscape.

309   We propose that these processes are effectively captured by the notion of 'power without capacity'.

310   At this stage it is important to clarify what we mean by this phrase. Firstly, we are not making any grand

311   claims of originality. As outlined earlier, recent research has used similar terminology (e.g., incoherent

312   state, governance gap etc.) to describe the dynamics of centralisation and fragmentation across the

313   UK public policy landscape (e.g., Flinders and Huggins 2021; Richards *et al*. 2023). Rather, we find it a

314   useful way of conceptualising the contradictory character of the trends identified by these scholars.

315   Nevertheless, we acknowledge that some may judge the phrase to be a contradiction in terms given

316   extensive debates as to whether *power* is *a capacity* and *whether such a capacity must be exercised to*

317   *constitute power.* Though we do not wish to intervene in these debates, it is important to note that we

318   are referring to 'power' in this instance as the *decision-making power* of the centre and 'capacity' as

319   the ability of the centre to *implement or deliver* policy. Here, Mann's distinction between 'despotic'

320   and 'infrastructural' power is useful in clarifying how the decision-making power of the centre might

321   be refurbished while its capacity to deliver is depleted. Mann (1984: 188-89) defined the former as

322   'the range of actions the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalised

323   negotiation with civil society groups', and the latter as 'the capacity of the state to actually penetrate

324   civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm'. By grounding the

325   notion of 'power without capacity' in Mann's framework, we contend that moves to (further) limit

326   negotiation in decision-making constitute attempts to enhance the centre's 'despotic power', whilst

327   examples of the inability to implement policy throughout the system demonstrate declining

328   'infrastructural power' or state *capacity* (Richards *et al.* 2023; Evemy & Parker n.d.).

329 The empirical discussion below depicts this landscape of centralised power and fragmented capacity.

330 To provide a dynamic account of how power shifts across the UK's patchwork of political institutions,

331 we distinguish between processes of centralisation and fragmentation *within central government* –

332 between departments and 'the core of the core' (No. 10 and coordinating units such as the Cabinet

333 Office and Treasury; see Smith 1999; Mullens-Burgess 2020) – and *between central government and*

334 *the political system beyond it* (Ward & Ward 2023).

335 The fragmentation of powers since the late 1970s-1980s has significantly weakened the centre's

336 capacity to operationalise its own policies. The Thatcher-Major years were largely characterised by

337 centralised decision-making, despite successive hits to the latter's authority reversing some of these

338 trends (Kavanagh & Seldon 2000). Yet the increasing exposure of the public sector to private forces

339 instigated significant fragmentation, creating opportunities for accumulation through privatisation and

340 new public management in policy delivery. The New Labour governments further diffused power

341 through extensive constitutional reform comprising devolution, Bank of England independence, the

342 Human Rights Act, and the extension of judicial review through creation of the Supreme Court. The

343 UK's fraught integration into an expanding EU also saw sovereignty pooled across policy areas

344 including agriculture, trade, the environment, and immigration. In terms of the relationship between

345 the core executive and the wider political system, the creation of new centres of power in the devolved

346 territories presented a significant challenge to the unitary state and parliamentary sovereignty,

347 eventuating in new sources of legislative authority. The proliferation of QUANGOs, NDPBs and other

348 private-public partnerships constituted a new 'regulatory state' (Moran 2003). Fragmentation

349 continued under the Coalition through the growth of regional combined authorities and mayoralties,

350 along with new bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships.

351 Emerging scholarship on Covid-19 highlights how the pandemic illuminated the impact of restrictions

352 to public expenditure and declining state capacity on the UK's capability to deliver public services.

353 Jones and Hameiri (2021) illustrate how the fragmentation of authority and state capacity instilled by

354 neoliberalism explains the UK's poor record during the pandemic. This is rooted in a system which

355 dispersed 'responsibility across a poorly coordinated, fragmented and decentralised array of public

356 and private entities…failing to ensure the provision of concrete state capacities' (Jones and Hameiri,

357 2021: 9-10; also, Diamond and Laffin 2022). Similarly, public policy scholars have documented how the

358 pandemic 'ruthlessly exposed' the fragmented and frail state of public service provision, presenting a

359 wider account of how devolution has 'heightened fragmentation' across the UK (Elliott *et al*. 2022:

360 100; 104). This lack of capacity is epitomised by the increasing resort to Military Aid to the Civilian

361 Authorities (MACA), which not only increased markedly during the pandemic but has been increasingly

362   called upon since 2022, to break strikes across the public sector, manage immigration, and in response

363   to rising conflict within the Metropolitan Police (Brooke-Holland 2022).

364   Against this backdrop of increased fragmentation, a complex picture of continued centralisation has

365   also been evident. Examining the 'British policy style', Jeremy Richardson (2018) argues that several

366   shifts in UK policymaking dating back to Thatcher – including the 'austerity turn', the shift towards a

367   more public, confrontational and impositional approach to reform, and the growing power of ministers

368   over civil servants – have contributed to the (re)emergence of a more traditional, hierarchical style of

369   *government* and a stronger centre (also Richards and Smith 2015). Richardson notes that consultation

370   has become increasingly constrained and stage-managed to minimise deliberation. Though the

371   Thatcher administration(s) instigated reforms which fragmented delivery, internal decision-making

372   power was centralised through the isolation of Cabinet and the growing influence of Special Advisers

373   (SPADs), whilst externally, local government autonomy was curtailed. Similarly, New Labour extended

374   the role of the private sector and devolved responsibilities outside the executive through its

375   constitutional reform programme, whilst simultaneously pursuing a 'paradoxical' process of internal

376   centralisation, with the powers of No. 10 and the Cabinet Office enhanced and Cabinet once again

377   marginalised (Flinders 2010). A yet more complex picture emerged under the Cameron governments,

378   as despite the prioritisation of combined authorities and a wider agenda of 'localism', local authorities,

379   QUANGOs and NDPBs suffered extensive cuts through austerity (Lowndes & Gardner 2016), and the

380   government sought to strengthen the capacity of the Cabinet Office to coordinate and control the

381   spending of government departments and NDPBs (Dommett and Flinders 2015).

382   This argument has been echoed in the context of Brexit by scholars who have noted how narratives

383   surrounding the UK's departure from the EU have been used to bolster the BPT. These accounts contest

384   whether the levels of fragmentation highlighted by scholars of MLG and the DPM ever obtained,

385   arguing that the reforms of the Thatcher and New Labour governments accommodated, rather than

386   replaced, the BPT (Hall *et al.* 2018: 378). The emphasis on repatriation of powers and reasserting

387   parliamentary sovereignty epitomised by the mantra 'take back control' arguably laid the ground for

388   entrenchment of 'the centralising, power-hoarding tendencies associated with the BPT' and

389   encapsulated the governing strategies of the May and Johnson administrations (Richards *et al.* 2019:

390   345). Scholars have also noted how Brexit revived central civil service recruitment to return some of

391   the capacity eroded by austerity and the gradual 'hollowing out' (Ward 2021), as well as reinvigorating

392   core components of the WM in terms of parliament-executive relations (Baldini *et al.* 2022). Patrick

393   Diamond (2022) has identified patterns in core executive politics which echo Richardson's account,

394   arguing that the Coalition presided over a shift away from mutual dependence between ministers and

395   civil servants and the emergence of a more conflictual '*them and us*' model. Further evidence of this

396 dynamic continues to emerge, as prominent public rifts between ministers and senior civil servants

397 have proliferated in a manner incongruous to traditional notions of 'impartiality' (Thomas 2023).

398 Whilst many have noted that the impulse of post-2016 governments has been a centralising one,

399 therefore, the principal targets of this process of centralisation are institutions introduced as part of

400 New Labour's constitutional reforms. Departure from the EU itself constituted a removal of one layer

401 of MLG amidst demands to 'take back control', and the Johnson government's marginalisation of

402 devolved administrations during the Brexit process constituted an attack on another, with the Internal

403 Market Act 2020 marking a particular flashpoint due to the constraints it placed on resource allocation

404 within the devolved administrations. Successive post-2016 Supreme Court interventions have

405 bolstered the political, legal, and intellectual case – particularly amongst those who favoured Brexit –

406 for a recentralisation of powers and a return to the pre-New Labour 'political' constitution in the name

407 of bolstering parliamentary sovereignty (Johnson & Zhu 2023). The continued prominence of judicial

408 review in day-to-day politics, particularly regarding immigration and home affairs, has spurred hostility

409 towards domestic courts, the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights,

410 prompting several pieces of legislation throughout 2022-23. The Truss government's 'dash for growth'

411 and the broader (re)politicisation of the Bank of England triggered by the 2021-23 inflationary spike

412 was also underpinned by a narrative of centralisation and reinstating the traditional constitution.

413 Three points are worth noting from this necessarily broad-brush discussion. Firstly, many of the sites

414 of power subject to challenge by the executive were either created or strengthened by governance

415 reforms since the 1980s. In particular, the institutions established by the New Labour governments

416 have provided new 'sites of possible contention' that have been targeted by both direct and indirect

417 attempts to recentralise power within central government (Ward & Ward 2023: 1177). Therefore, the

418 reassertion of the centre in the post-2016 context could be read as a partial attempt to return to the

419 *status quo ante*, well within the spirit of the WM and BPT (see Sandford 2023). Secondly, the centre's

420 recent attempts to assert its authority over institutions such as the courts and devolved governments

421 have met limited success because of the potential for contestation or resistance from these new sites

422 of power. Indeed, many of these institutions achieved greater public profile during Brexit and the

423 pandemic, demonstrating that fragmentation may have altered public expectations of territorial

424 governance over the long term (Ward & Ward 2023: 1186-1187). As noted by various metagovernance

425 scholars, therefore, the intensification of contradictory centrifugal-centripetal pressures has created a

426 'pathological' situation in which the centre struggles to retain 'steering' capacity over policy delivery

427 yet continues to hold on – and indeed seek to extend – decision-making power (Gaskell *et al*. 2021).

428 Finally, the potential for contestation across the multi-level system has filtered into the party system.

429 Dual processes of centralisation and fragmentation present various devolution dilemmas for party-

430   political actors. For example, should Scottish Labour seek greater autonomy from the statewide Labour

431   Party, or should they seek to gain more influence at Westminster (Brown Swan & Kenny 2024)? Similar

432   questions have arisen and continue to pertain to local and regional mayoral contexts.

433

434   **Conclusion: Understanding UK politics today**

435   The proliferation of crises which have followed the 2016 EU referendum have generated questions

436   about the continued relevance of extant frameworks for analysing UK politics, and even about the

437   merits of the sub-discipline in general. Territorial differentiation is to the fore of these debates, with

438   scholars highlighting how the field was blinded to the 2016 referendum result at least in-part due to a

439   'British Politics' tradition that has veiled trends distinctive to England by taking Britain 'unreflectingly

440   as its unit of analysis' (Henderson *et al.* 2017: 644). Moreover, the re-emergence of intractable political

441   conflict in Northern Ireland has highlighted the significance of unconsciously short-handing *UK* Politics

442   to '*British* Politics', with the failure to consider the implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland

443   exemplifying how the territory is marginalised in both academic and everyday political discourse

444   (Murphy and Evershed 2022). The post-2016 period has thus seen calls to treat English, Scottish, Welsh

445   and Northern Irish politics as discrete units of analysis which are equally shaped by their own distinct

446   political traditions, electoral circumstances and cultural heritages (Wright 2020; Henderson and Wyn

447   Jones 2021). Furthermore, the exigency of reframing academic disciplines from the perspective of

448   decolonisation raises further questions for the field, particularly in relation to oft-cited categories such

449   as 'white working class' and its association with the Brexit vote (Shilliam 2018; Begum *et al.*, 2021).

450   In introducing the notion of 'power without capacity' we hope to draw attention to the tensions which

451   characterise contemporary UK politics. The phrase describes a dual dynamic of centralisation-

452   fragmentation, in which the centre continually seeks to assert control over policy decisions it is

453   democratically accountable for, in a differentiated policy landscape in which responsibility for

454   coordination and delivery is diffused across multiple actors and institutions, undermining central state

455   capacity. This reframing aims to assist new students and researchers of UK politics through the

456   rediscovery of evergreen issues in public policy, such as the gap between dominant ideas of

457   policymaking and policy practice, as well as illustrating how recent phenomena, such as the failures of

458   pandemic management, can be explained through the co-existence of a persistent, and potentially

459   resurgent BPT and WM, alongside concomitant processes of fragmentation.

460   In a context of power without capacity, the constraints which governments face arguably enhance the

461   appeal of two strategies. First, the obstacles to delivering policy in the system we have described

462   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., Heikkila, 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.

Evemy, J. and Parker, S. (n.d.) 'Command But No Control: the Despotic and Infrastructural Powers of UK Immigration Policy after Brexit', Working Paper.

Flinders, M. (2010) *Democratic Drift: Majoritarian Modification and Democratic Anomie in the United Kingdom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flinders, M. and Huggins, C. (2021) 'Modes of State Governance, Populist Pressures and Public Sector Reform', in J. Connolly and A. van der Zwet (eds) *Public Value Management, Governance and Reform in Britain*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (International Series on Public Policy), pp. 87–114.

Flinders, M. *et al.* (2022) '"Stretched But Not Snapped": A Response to Russell and Serban on Retiring the "Westminster Model"', *Government and Opposition*, 57(2), pp. 353–369.

Gamble, A. (1990) 'Theories of British Politics', *Political Studies*, 38(3), pp. 404–420.

Gaskell, J. *et al.* (2020) 'Covid-19 and the Blunders of our Governments: Long-run System Failings Aggravated by Political Choices', *The Political Quarterly*, 91(3), pp. 523–533.

Geddes, M. (2019) 'The Explanatory Potential of "Dilemmas": Bridging Practices and Power to Understand Political Change in Interpretive Political Science', *Political Studies Review*, 17(3), pp. 239–254.

Hall, M. (2011) *Political Traditions and UK Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hall, M., Marsh, D. and Vines, E. (2018) 'A changing democracy: contemporary challenges to the British political tradition', *Policy Studies*, 39(4), pp. 365–382.

Harmes, A. (2006) 'Neoliberalism and Multilevel Governance', *Review of International Political Economy*, 13(5), pp. 725–749.

Henderson, A. *et al.* (2017) 'How Brexit was made in England', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19(4), pp. 631–646.

Henderson, A. and Jones, R.W. (2021) *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hood, C. (2011) *The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy, and Self-Preservation in Government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2003) 'Unraveling the Central State, but How? Types of Multi-level Governance', *American Political Science Review*, 97(2), pp. 233–243.

Jessop, B. (2016) 'Territory, Politics, Governance and Multispatial Metagovernance', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 4(1), pp. 8–32.

Johnson, R. and Zhu, Y.Y. (eds) (2023) *Sceptical Perspectives on the Changing Constitution of the United Kingdom*. Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Jones, L. and Hameiri, S. (2021) 'COVID-19 and the failure of the neoliberal regulatory state', *Review of International Political Economy*, 0(0), pp. 1–25.

Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (2000) *The Powers Behind the Prime Minister: The Hidden Influence of Number Ten*. London: HarperCollins UK.

The Labour Party (2022) A New Britain: Renewing Our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy. Available at: Commission-on-the-UKs-Future.pdf (labour.org.uk)

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 (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.