



WESTMINSTER TRANSPLANTED AND WESTMINSTER IMPLANTED: EXPLORING POLITICAL CHANGE

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‘The Westminster model? Haven’t you read the Hutton report? It doesn’t exist any more’. Comedian John Clark, *7.30 Report*, ABC TV, 4 March 2004.

Governments and international agencies have long sought to improve the ability of developing nations to manage their economies effectively by the adoption of Western democratic systems of governance. Yet, the characteristics of good governance they are aiming for can vary. For example, the World Bank’s (1992) definition includes an expert public service, an accountable administration, a pluralistic political system and respect for law. Even if those characteristics are accepted, there are several ways to organise these structures. What system is likely to prove the most compatible with local conditions? The historical record suggests that, among previous transplants, Westminster systems are among the most enduring and stable institutions.¹ However, even they are not always successful. In some countries, they have been adapted. In others, they have failed. There is then a basic *practical* problem: what is the likely interaction between local traditions and the imported political arrangements? What determines the resilience of the model? There has been little basic comparative research seeking to answer this question.

This book has three objectives.

- ✓ to understand how and why countries that began with a shared set of ideas develop different practices and interpretations of the same institutions
- ✓ to understand how these constitutional ideas interacted with local structures of power and local political traditions and elites
- ✓ to determine what conditions provided the most fertile ground for transplanting the Westminster model, which parts of the arrangements determine its resilience and what lessons can be learnt for future application.

Why Westminster systems? Because they share a British heritage, yet they have developed and are developing independently in different ways. Practitioners often use the term ‘Westminster model’ normatively to define the way their government ought to work. They appeal to some long-lost ‘golden age’. Such appeals are little more than rhetoric. We reject the notion of an idealised Westminster model as of limited analytical value. Yet there is a common heritage; many of the institutions bear the same names and work in similar ways. Each is an adaptation of the original (even Britain has now changed). The Westminster model does not tell politicians how to behave. It describes how government might be organised. It provides a set of beliefs and a shared inheritance that creates expectations, and hands down rules that guide and justify behaviour. The practices of Westminster systems have shown remarkable resilience, surviving under different regimes and in different circumstances across the world.

These assumptions about how executive government should be organised interacted with local approaches and traditions and thus necessarily altered the way they were practised. The phrase ‘governmental tradition’ refers to a set of inherited beliefs and practices about the institutions and history of government. It includes such features as the inherited power structure, attitudes to authority, women, class and caste, race and family, and accepted practices. These beliefs vary across countries and we will explore whether they account for the receptivity of the country to imported political practices.

There are two groups of countries where these phenomena can be explored. First, there are the *transplanted Westminster systems* where settler societies without prior local traditions other than indigenous cultures

adopted the structures, but then began to adjust them to local conditions. There are two examples in this book: Australia and New Zealand. Second, there are the *implanted Westminster systems* where, post-1945, the former colonies inherited British constitutional arrangements as part of decolonisation and winning independence. The inheritance either came directly (India, Pakistan, Malaysia or Fiji), indirectly through a secondary colonial master (Papua New Guinea courtesy of Australia) or by deliberate imitation (Nepal). They then had to adjust those practices to local traditions and beliefs.

We will look for comparisons *within* and *between* the experiences of these two groups of countries. We will seek to show the following.

- ✔ How the ideas and practices were interpreted and mediated by the responsible politicians and administrators.
- ✔ How some countries were more or less receptive to the adoption and evolution of the practices.
- ✔ How new practices emerged that allowed a democratic ‘Westminster’ system to flourish, albeit in a different form.
- ✔ How later challenges or crises continued this process of adaptation, determining which practices were worth preserving, which needed change.
- ✔ Why Westminster systems have become resilient democracies despite different origins and backgrounds.

The book confronts questions that lie at the heart of the debate about the validity of comparative politics. What can we learn by contrasting the development of similar institutions under different conditions? The comparison of countries with similar starting points and sets of political institutions but different cultures allows us to develop an approach to comparative politics rooted in the analysis of traditions. If inherited rules and practices create expectations and shape action (see March and Olsen 1989), how and why have such imported traditions as cabinet government and collective responsibility, beginning as shared ideas and a common language, become markedly different? What impact have local ideas had on the way executive government is organised and run? By analysing the historical development of the various Westminster systems, we will develop explanations about the way governments are shaped and structured. By concentrating on nations with a common heritage we avoid some of the

definitional problems of multi-country comparisons of executives (see, for example, Blondel 1982 and 1985, and the critique in Rhodes 1993).

Many argue that Westminster systems are more resilient and effective than presidential or European-consensual systems (Pinto-Duschinsky 1999). The book will also allow us to ask whether the critiques of Westminster both from the right (it is ineffective and indecisive) and the left (it is a representative sham) are justified by contrast to those other systems (see, for example, Linz 1994 and Lijphart 1992).

The book starts from a historical event: the acceptance, whether by transplant or implant, of Westminster structures and conventions by governments as they became independent of Britain. We then seek to explain the resulting changes in political practices, nationally and comparatively. We will focus on the core institutions of Westminster systems.

Beliefs and the Westminster model

The first step is to review the literature and provide a systematic list of the beliefs said to constitute the Westminster model. Table 1.1 attempts such a summary (and it would take redundancy to ridiculous lengths to add more references).

TABLE 1.1 The Westminster model: A summary statement

Beliefs	Sources
The constitutional framework	
A unitary state	Gamble 1990: 407; Lijphart 1999: 3.
No separation of powers and, therefore, no judicial review of constitution	Jaensch and Teichmann 1987: 143; Jaensch 1996: 217; Jaensch 1997: 98
A bicameral parliament	Carey 1980: 227; Evans 1990: 31; Lucy 1985: 3.
The doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty	Campbell and Wilson 1995; Verney 1991: 637; Gamble 1990: 407; Jaensch 1997:102; Jupp 1982; Mahler 1997: 46; Marchant 1999: 5; Richards and Smith 2002: 48; Weller 1989: 6
Flexible constitutional conventions	Emy and Hughes 1991: 268; Gamble 1990: 407; Jaensch 1997: 102; Verney 1991: 637; Weller 1989: 5.

Beliefs	Sources
The parties	
A two-party system based on single member constituencies	Campbell and Wilson 1995; Derbyshire and Derbyshire 1989; Evans 1990: 30; Lijphart 1999: 3; Mahler 1997: 43-44; Verney 1991: 637.
Majority party–government control of parliament	Campbell and Wilson 1995; Jupp 1982; Mahler 1997: 40; Reid and Forrest 1989: 316; Thompson 1980: 37; Verney 1991: 637; Watson 1975: 400.
Institutionalised opposition	Verney 1991: 637; Gamble 1990: 407; Weller 1989: 6.
Accountability through elections	Davis 1997: 45; Davis et al., 1993: 131; Emy and Hughes 1991: 252; Gamble 1990: 407; Hawker 1981: 23; Lucy 1985: 4; Parker 1978: 353; Thompson 1980: 37; Richards and Smith 2002: 48; Weller 1989: 7.
Beliefs	Sources
The executive	
The head of state and the head of government are two separate roles.	Jaensch 1997: 102; De Smith; 1961: 3; Thompson 1980: 33.
Majority party control of the executive also described as the fusion of the legislature and the executive – with ministers drawn from the parliament.	De Smith 1961: 3; Emy and Hughes 1991: 348; Evans 1990: 61; Gamble 1990: 407; Lijphart 1999: 3; Lucy 1985: 133; Mahler 1997: 46; Thompson 1980: 34; Watson 1975: 400; Wilson 1994: 190-93; Reid and Forrest 1989: 316; Richards and Smith 2002: 48.
Concentration of executive power in prime minister and cabinet	De Smith 1961: 3; Emy and Hughes 1991: 360; Gamble 1990: 407; Lijphart 1999: 3; Richards and Smith 2002: 48; Verney 1991: 637; Weller 1989: 5.
Individual ministerial and collective cabinet responsibility to parliament.	Butler, 1973: chapter 7; Campbell and Wilson 1995: 11; Carey 1980: 228;