

Excerpts from **Hill, Brian. 'Parliament, Parties and Elections (1688–1760)'. *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. H. T. Dickinson. Cornwall: Blackwell, 2002. 55-68.**

“Without the increased importance of parliament after the Revolution the development of a new type of political party could not have taken place. In the Cavalier Parliament, Court and Country parties had existed, but these differed in important respects from later parties, for they possessed little idea of competing to exchange the roles of office and opposition. The Court party, looking to the monarch as its leader and wishing to serve the government, could not by its nature go into opposition. The Country party, a diverse set of MPs who voted on issues as they saw fit and who were generally critical of the expenses and practices of government, could not enter government *as a party*. Soon after the Revolution, however, the new Tory and Whig parties underwent several major interchanges between government and opposition, and parliament witnessed regular conflicts between these two parties. With the Whig ascendancy from 1714 to 1760 ministerial changes became less frequent and were confined to Whigs.

The Whig and Tory parties differed from their modern successors in some important respects: they had no national organization linking constituencies with the parliamentary party, and any constituency organizations bore only embryonic resemblance to those of today. In parliament mechanisms to make supporters available for important divisions were effective but primitive by modern standards, especially in lacking the sanction of reporting dereliction of duty to any local party organization. A party in office could use the junior Treasury ministers to exert some discipline on its supporters in the Commons, while opposition leaders could ensure attendance at divisions only through voluntary party managers.

The names Tory and Whig originally arose as terms of abuse: meaning, respectively, Catholic Irish outcasts and Presbyterian Scottish outcasts from pre-Revolution Anglican society. The two terms were first used at Westminster during the Exclusion crisis of 1679–82, when the taunt of Tory was applied to the crown's supporters and that of Whig to its opponents. Three successive parliaments were dissolved by Charles II when the Commons brought in bills to exclude his brother James, a Catholic, from the succession. After Tories joined Whigs reluctantly and briefly in order to protect the Church of England and remove the Catholic James II in 1688, their differences were renewed by fresh issues which divided the nation between 1689 and about 1720. Thereafter, the residue of such issues kept party differences alive in a situation of continuous Whig dominance until 1760, when new circumstances dictated a collapse of both parties and a slow emergence of successors which was not completed until early in the nineteenth century.”

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“As soon as the immediate Catholic threat was removed in 1688 there came to the fore the deeply contentious rivalry of Anglican Episcopalians and Protestant Dissenters, hardened by two generations of persecution and counter-persecution (though this had been temporarily suppressed in the common cause against James II). The Toleration Act of 1689, by which Anglicans recognized the Dissenters' right to worship in their own way, did not extend to the removal of the civil disabilities under which the Dissenters had been placed by the Test and Corporation Acts of the Cavalier Parliament, including exclusion from all government and local offices. The practice of some Dissenters of occasionally taking Anglican communion in order to obtain office under the crown or to join a borough corporation angered Anglicans, just as Anglican insistence on making a test of the sacrament infuriated Dissenters.

To religious differences were added grievances concerning the Dissenters' control of dozens of boroughs where the corporation or freemen constituted the electorate. Purges of corporations to control

national elections took place under Charles II and James II. The burning resentments of the local oligarchies thus dispossessed came before parliament as early as 1689, and control of the borough seats continued to be sharply contested between Dissenters, who voted for Whig candidates, and their opponents who favoured Tories. Bishop Burnet noted in 1708 that the party differences existed not only in parliamentary elections but even in the yearly elections of mayors and corporations, and that in every corner of the nation the two parties stood, as it were, listed against one another.

In parliament wartime expenditure on an unprecedented scale after 1689 proved increasingly politically divisive, with Tories favouring relatively cheap naval and only limited land operations, while the Whigs favoured more expensive military intervention in Europe against France's armies. To pay for extended and expensive war the Whigs were prepared to support the financial revolution which saw the creation of the Bank of England, the national debt and a new system of public credit. The Whigs supported the financial interests of the City of London, who stood to gain from lending to the government at high wartime rates of interest, while the Tories sympathized more with the country landowners, who paid the land tax that helped to meet the interest rates on the large war loans raised by the government and sanctioned by parliament.

The two related questions of defence of the established Church of England and the safeguarding of the Protestant succession were never far from the fore. The Tories' main commitment remained always the safety of the Church of England, whether against Roman Catholics or Protestant Dissenters, a defining principle of their party because the Whigs, though mainly Anglican (as MPs were required to be), were more tolerant of Protestant Dissenters and favoured them as reliable election supporters. But the Whigs' main aim from the Exclusion crisis onwards was rejection of the Catholic Stuarts. Although the majority of Tories demonstrated in 1688, 1715 and 1745 that they too were basically loyal to the Protestant succession, enough 'Jacobite' supporters of the exiled House of Stuart remained within their ranks to cast doubt on the whole party's commitment to the Hanoverian succession. This helped to ensure that only the Whig party could claim undivided loyalty to the Protestant cause."

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"The rise of Robert Walpole followed the first split among the Whigs in 1717. Despite the obvious overtones of a struggle for control of patronage among a party now too large to satisfy all its claimants, the issues which divided the two main groups were substantial and important. Lord Stanhope at first prevailed, but his ministry's use of British resources to further the interests of George I's German possessions gave cause for objections by Lord Townshend and his brother-in-law, Robert Walpole. In domestic policies Stanhope represented an idealist element closer to the original Whigs of the Exclusion era, while Walpole appeared more pragmatic. All Whigs agreed to repeal the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, but Stanhope wished also to remove the Test and Corporation Acts of Charles II's reign and allow Protestant Dissenters to take a wide range of offices. The Townshend-Walpole group's preference was for retaining the tests, since Dissenters would vote for Whig candidates anyway, and there was every reason to mollify the Anglican church which included most English people and which the Whigs needed to win over from the Tory cause. A large body of Walpole Whigs helped the Tories to reject Stanhope's scheme, together with his proposal to strengthen the House of Lords by means of the Peerage Bill, moving politics closer to the centre against the Whig party extremity.

Walpole's primacy (1721-42) rested on a control of parliament arising from a powerful combination of party principles and patronage. In the House of Lords ministerial pressure on the bishops, obtained by judicious career advancement from poor to rich bishoprics, accounted for up to twenty-six votes, twenty-five of which saved Walpole from a defeat on one major occasion in 1733. Government management, aided by Scotland's staunch Whiggery, ensured that only one Tory was

returned for the northern kingdom in the 1722 election, and none in 1727. Most Scottish MPs were co-opted into the ranks of the Court and Treasury party (those placemen who could usually be counted upon to vote on the government's side). But a putative eighteenth-century maximum of 200 placemen by 1760 never dominated the Commons of 558 members, and the ministry relied for survival on the large number of Whigs who, regardless of patronage, supported Walpole's formula of combining support for the House of Hanover with low taxation and restraint on the expensive overseas policies of the Hanoverian monarchs."

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"The new Whig and Tory parties of the 1690s, relieved of immutable Court and Country roles, competed for office within a permanent parliamentary framework, and though party animosities sometimes ran to extremes they did not slide over into physical force, apart from the occasions when a parliamentary minority supported the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. The Tories' worst nightmare was a revival of militant Puritanism under a new Oliver Cromwell, but post-Revolution Dissenters were no Puritans and had little remaining political ambition except to share the political rights open to others. The Whigs' fear of a new restoration of the Catholic Stuarts had more reality, but few Tories could countenance the return of the Stuart Pretender unless he abandoned Roman Catholicism, which he always refused to do. Party dialogue gradually marginalized extreme views and strengthened the centre, with moderates combining in the crises of 1688–9, 1704, 1714 and 1719."