

**Does Government Know Best?:  
The Challenge of European Integration and the  
Marginalisation of ‘the People’ in the British  
Political System**

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## ABSTRACT

British democracy has proved exceptionally stable and resilient; yet the price of this stability has been the marginalisation of ‘the People’ in their own democracy. This thesis explores the tenuous connection between citizens and their political system, considering this in relation to the challenge of European integration and its impact at a domestic level. Issues such as, referendums, depoliticisation, populism, anti-politics and, most broadly, the tension between popular and parliamentary sovereignty, are explored over five articles: ‘A Common Appeal: Anglo-British nationalism and opposition to Europe, 1970-1975’; ‘Populism and Sovereignty: The EU Act and the In-Out Referendum, 2010–2015’; ‘Reframing *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism*: from Populism to the British Political Tradition’; ‘A Challenge to Depoliticisation? UKIP and Anti-politics’; and, ‘Anti-Politics: Beyond Supply-Side versus Demand-Side Explanations’. Over the course of these articles, a British Political Tradition is identified. This is a Tradition based upon the belief that ‘Government knows best’; the masses are not to be empowered or trusted. Within such a system, centralised, elite control; responsible, not responsive government; and the preservation of the status quo, rather than democratic reform, are favoured. Whether such a conviction can be sustained in a time of anti-politics, however, is questionable. Pressure for reform appears to be growing as major parties face defections to minor parties and populist alternatives, such as the UK Independence Party. A shift in British politics is occurring and it seems that ‘the People’ are beginning to ask whether Government really does know best.

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