



# Why We Get the Wrong Politicians

*Isabel Hardman*

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**Winner at the 2018 Parliamentary Book Awards**

**Shortlisted for the 2018 Waterstones Book of the Year**

***Daily Telegraph's Best Books of the Year, 2018***

***Guardian's Best Books of the Year, 2018***

***Evening Standard's Best Books of the Year, 2018***

***Daily Mail's Best Books of the Year, 2018***

**BBC's Biggest Books, 2018**

Politicians are consistently voted the least trusted professional group by the UK public. They've recently become embroiled in scandals concerning sexual harassment and expenses. Every year, they introduce new legislation that doesn't do what it sets out to achieve - often with terrible financial and human costs. But, with some notable exceptions, they are decent, hard-working people, doing a hugely difficult and demanding job.

In this searching examination of our political class, award-winning journalist Isabel Hardman tries to square this circle. She lifts the lid on the strange world of Westminster and asks why we end up with representatives with whom we are so unhappy. Filled with forensic analysis and revealing reportage, this landmark and accessible book is a must read for anyone who wants to see a future with better government.

## Why We Get the Wrong Politicians Details

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## From Reader Review Why We Get the Wrong Politicians for online ebook

### Paul Bryant says

December 2018 : Britain is stuck fast in the most absurd political quicksand. As the date for leaving the EU looms nearer (29 March 2019) these damned politicians literally don't know what to do. Theresa May, the massively incompetent prime minister who almost lost the last election when it should have been a stroll in the park for the Conservatives, has spent two years in eye-bugging migraine-inducing negotiations with the EU and has hammered out a detailed (585 page long!) agreement that to her horror the British Parliament will not vote for – even her own party. So obvious was it that everyone hated her deal that she would not even put it forward to the House of Commons for approval, as she has to do.

What to do? Go back to the EU and ask for a few tweaks here and there? They have said a firm no to any real changes. Then bring the deal back & get defeated in the House of Commons? Then what?

If there is no deal agreed by next March the UK will leave the EU without one & this, says everyone apart from a small gang of rightwing headbangers, will be very bad. It will be a little local apocalypse - better stockpile your medications and cancel your holidays if that happens! Better start keeping edible pets! That nuclear bunker you had installed in 1987 doesn't look so stupid now!

Theresa May's own MPs tabled a motion of no confidence in Theresa May last week. She won it though, two thirds of her party supported her. (I wonder if Donald Trump would win a vote of no confidence amongst Republican senators?)

Siren voices are calling for a second referendum – the first asked the question “do you want to leave the EU?” – it was a yes/no thing, and was won by the leavers 52% to 48%. It did not ask HOW you want to leave, & that has been the big problem. There are many ways to leave, it turns out! But other people say – are you crazy? That would only postpone our terminal confusion!

The Labour Party, meanwhile, is calling for a general election. They won't get it as you have to have a two thirds majority in the Commons to have a snap election & the Conservatives will not be voting for it as turkeys would also not be voting for the upcoming Christmas should they have been enfranchised. If they did get it then the problem would be theirs, and they don't know what to do either.

There is no solution to this! But there must be! But there isn't!

This book by a wellknown political journo is a jeremiad about British politics & lands at the exact right time. No one can dispute the main arguments here, that the gruesome culture of Westminster & the House of Commons smothers any outbreaks of competence like a fire blanket. Isabel Hardman anatomises all the 'orrible things about members of parliament –

They are mostly posh, mostly male, mostly white, mostly middleaged

Becoming a parliamentary candidate is really very 'orrible and can drive you mad

Should you succeed, being an MP is quite likely to destroy your family life & your marriage. So to avoid that you can employ your spouse as your office manager and are then accused of nepotism.

It's a lonely life with too many very late nights, much freeflowing booze and too many plumptious eager

young researchers and too many rabid journalists aching to catch you at it, like the one mp who was inveigled into sending a photo of his genitalia on Snapchat to a delectable young lady who was really a male reporter taking a screenshot

The mps are just voting fodder shepherded around by the evil whips. (The term comes from hunting – the whipper-in was a guy who whipped stray dogs to make them go back into the hunting pack.)

The mps all suck up their numerous humiliations because they want to become ministers and start being important

The House of Commons is like Gormenghast, with a thousand rooms and ten thousand arcane rules and no rule book (words you may not use in a Commons debate : hooligan, git, rat, stoolpigeon and Pecksniffian. You can't infer any fellow mp is a liar or a hypocrite even though you know they are both.)

The public think you're in it for the money, however many shelters for the homeless or donkey sanctuaries you have established

Like any junkie you hate your drug (politics!) and you love it, hate it, love it, round and round

No one rewards anybody for proper scrutiny of proposed legislation so mostly that doesn't happen and we wind up with shambolic laws like the bedroom tax

All of this is delivered in a swift merrily gurgling stream of suppressed horror by Isabel Hardman but her book has two problems –

1 – is this how politics is done everywhere or do some countries do it better? If so, who? And do not say SWEDEN or I will bite you. There are no comparisons so for all the reader knows Britain is doing politics much better than anywhere! It might be rubbish but you should see the others!

2 – how should this sorry state be fixed? Isabel has a rather rushed 20 pages right at the end and it is not convincing.

But, a pretty good read for political addicts like myself.

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## **Julie Hudson says**

Excellent look at parliamentary life from the inside. It's such a massive thing to change but so desperately in need of reform to make it fit for purpose for current times. Very frustrating reading about the various legislations that have been passed without proper scrutiny and no real measures in place to improve the situation. There must be other political structures around the world that work better that we could emulate. Did I have more sympathy for MPs after reading the book? I can't say I have really. It can only be changed from the inside and there aren't enough MPs looking to change it. Bit depressing really.

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## **Stuart says**

I recommend anyone who wants to stand for public office to read this book.

I recognise a lot of what the first half of this book talks about either through my own personal experience of being a Council candidate or helping to campaign for others during differing elections. It doesn't matter what level you are standing for: Council; Scottish Parliament; Westminster; a lot of what is referred to is common to all.

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### **Michael Nicholson says**

A really interesting insight into the personal aspects of the processes of becoming, being, and ceasing to be an MP and the impact that these have on the recruitment of good candidates. It also explores some of less visible Westminster processes and demonstrates why they're a poor use of everyone's time and in need of reform. The anecdotes from serving and former MPs make this a rich text that leave you with a rare feeling these days- empathy and sympathy for politicians.

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### **Julia MacBeath says**

Fascinating, very fair and sympathetic look at the process of entering parliament and the legislative system in the UK. Includes some interesting suggestions for improvements to the current system which would help MPs do a better job of scrutinising legislation and holding the government to account. A really enjoyable read considering given the subject matter it could have been rather dry and technical. The author includes lots of stories about current and former MPs which gives her book a human aspect and really gives us an insight into the lives of MPs and candidates.

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### **Jonny says**

This is a quick read but a good canter through some of the drivers of dysfunctionality in Westminster and, in less detail, what could be done about it. The chapter on the pressures on MPs' families and personal lives is particularly well-researched, as are the bits on how ill-defined the role of an MP is. The final chapter (how things could be improved) is a combination of really good ideas -giving Select Committees more power to bring forward legislation and treating that as a serious career option - and some that would be hideous (the idea of 'Payback Panels' is good in theory, but seems like it would be a recipe for Twitter, only in person).

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### **Matthew Tebbutt says**

The range of interviews gives the book a depth that I was not expecting. It adds a human element to the machine. The central point is clear and well reinforced. It could all too easily have been an insider expose but has more grace than that. I hope someone can write something similar for the aid industry.

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### **Jo says**

This book is a really eye opening insight into the way our Parliament works (or rather, doesn't work). I understand things about the mechanics of government that were murky to me as a layperson, with Hardman explaining things in a relatable and non-partisan style that ought to appeal to all.

She poses the problems (mainly all traceable back to the fact that politicians are flawed people, like we all are) and then some solutions, but there are no revolutionary suggestions here. Rather, incremental and simple changes are proposed which, while far from glamorous and attention grabbing, might have some chance of actually being achieved and achieving something.

The only slight criticism I would have of this book is that there seem points in the text where it hasn't been edited very well. While I appreciate the non-formal style of the language, there were a few sentences that I actually didn't understand because of their word order and grammar, and needed to read again to make sense of them. A small point however and certainly not one that should stop you reading.

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### **Holly Law says**

I feel much more knowledgeable about how Parliament works, and the problems that frustrate good laws being made after finishing this book.

Really interesting for anyone interested in how our country is run, especially for people like me with ambitions to become a parliamentary candidate. This book has strengthened my belief that I have the right intentions.

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### **Will Tomsett says**

This was a very interesting, if slightly flawed, book. On the plus side, the author's diagnoses are very strong - particularly on the issues around the lack of legislative scrutiny and the excessive focus on constituency work. I really learnt a lot from these (slightly depressing) chapters which highlight just how unrewarding being a legislator is (vs jockeying for ministerial position) and how overwhelmed MPs are by constituency work. Additionally, Ms Hardman's prescriptions for the problem, though brief, seem well-thought through and intelligent - she certainly convinced me that paying someone more to be a Select Committee Chair, for example, would be a superb move to convince MPs that being in the government was really not the only aim of being an MP.

However, I was frustrated by this book as it failed to define its terms. What is the 'wrong' politician? Unfortunately the author does not inform us, and so the argument of the work is undermined drastically - as the 'wrong' politician is simultaneously someone who is a) a sex pest b) a terrible scrutineer of legislation c) an out of touch elitist d) wealthy e) a fat old white man or f) someone who just wants to climb the greasy pole. All of these are valid descriptions of a 'wrong' politician but I was frustrated that we don't ever settle on a clear definition.

Overall though a really informative book from which I learnt a lot - especially the chapters on parliamentary procedure, which should be required reading in any Politics A level course.

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## **Caro says**

Why We Get the Wrong Politicians by Isabel Hardman is brilliant. If you're interested in political sciences and why Westminster hasn't been working for the British people then this is the book for you. Read by the author, the audio edition was really compelling. There isn't a clear separation of power between the government and MPs which makes legislating harder. The incentives and conditions to be an MP aren't working as only privileged and well-connected people can realistically be candidates. There is lots of food for thought on changes needed for a better political landscape in the UK.

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## **Chloe Hutchinson says**

Brilliant examination of the issues in the ways in which the UK parliament functions, how MPs are selected and the barriers individuals face, and the expectations the electorate have.

The writing style is accessible and makes it easy to follow what can be a complex debate. The extensive notes section at the back and referencing throughout makes it a great introduction to anyone wanting to learn more about Parliament.

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## **Matthew Kilburn says**

The title is a little misleading, as part of Isabel Hardman's argument is that the popular perception (if she sets it up accurately) that the United Kingdom has the wrong politicians is mistaken, and that to some extent politicians are trapped in a system which too many people have vested interests in not changing. The bias towards people able and willing to fund their own campaigns - both to become a candidate, and then to be elected to parliament - and against women - with conservatism over women's roles rife in all parties. The book is rich in anecdotes about selection, election, bill committees, select committees, and the combined results of the efforts of the whips and the sheer weight of government business to ensure that bad bills reach the statute book. Few pages - indeed, only a few lines - are devoted to comparisons with other legislatures, and only a little more space is devoted to reform. Ideas include reviving bill committees after the passage of a bill so that members can hear evidence on how a bill works in practice, but it's difficult to see how this would provide a constructive method to improve on legislation. More concrete suggestions include salaries for parliamentary candidates, and salaries for members of select committees, as well as dedicated staff.

This isn't an apologia, even though Hardman did fall in love with one of her MP case studies which I'm sure isn't recommended practice. There is a lot of reporting of situations in recent years where MPs off and on the front benches should have done much better, being distracted by the legality of a proceeding - such as the invasions of Iraq and Libya - over the practicalities and details of the post-invasion plans, or in the case of Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Bill was allegedly allowed by government to career into the Commons without either of the Coalition government party leaders understanding what was planned. However, while entertaining it leaves one more frustrated with the state of affairs than confident about solutions.

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## **Stephen Hawker says**

### **Excellent insightful summary of the current state of Parliament and why it's not working**

Well worth a read if you want a clear and succinct summary of some of the deep flaws of our parliamentary system and the reasons why it so often fails to deliver the law making and oversight we need.

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### **Dom418 says**

This is a great starting point if you're interested in the myriad reasons why MPs can be ineffective legislators and scrutineers. Hardman explores the life-cycle of the MP, from selection as a Parliamentary candidate to seeking elevation to Government to searching for a new job after losing their seat. It runs through the hurdles at each of these stages, some of which come back to the prohibitive cost of standing for Parliament and others where responsibility lies with the stranglehold of the party whipping system.

It's a great introduction on this topic, and Hardman's style is clear and entertaining.

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