Political culture and popular politics in the ‘Long’ 19th century

Britain was (and is) a constitutional monarchy
- mixed government based on partnership

Crown (monarchy)
House of Lords (Aristocracy)
House of Commons (Democracy)

Theories of the constitution
1. Divine Right
2. Original contract
3. Ancient constitution

Houses of Parliament
- House of Lords is less important than the House of Commons
- House of Commons
  558 MPs 1707-1801
  17% of adult men in England and Wales could vote in the late 18th century
  Importance of patronage and ‘corruption’
  Dominated by landowners

Changing political and constitutional practice 1780-1832
- Crown most important at start of period, but declined rapidly thereafter
- Decline of crown meant parliament, especially House of Commons due to control of taxation
- Decline of patronage meant that only basis of government was a secure House of Commons majority - need supporters

Purpose of elections
Before 1868 no government ‘fell’ because of a general election, as they do today

As Eric Evans argues ‘By his actions in 1868, Disraeli publicly acknowledged the effective sovereignty of the electorate’

E.J. Evans *Political Parties in Britain* 1783-1867 (London 1985) p.51