

The United Kingdom:

One country, made up of four nations

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

Constitutional monarchy - with limited federalism. Some of the nations have their own national assemblies. Parliament handles matters that pertain to England or whole UK.

Parliament:

Began in 1215 with the signing of the Magna Carta. Continued by Simon De Montfort in 1265. Included commoners for the first time. Commoners and lords held separate advisory roles

- Three parts of Parliament
 1. The Regent (Queen Elizabeth II)
 2. The House of Lords
 3. The House of Commons

The Regent:

Descendant of the Kings of medieval England. Through royal prerogative:

- Signs all legislation
- Is the sole person who can declare War or Peace
- Calls on majority party in the House of Commons to form a government in his or her name.

House of Lords:

- Successors of the Barons, Earls, Dukes, and Marquesses of medieval England and Scotland
- Members are called “Peers”
- Appointed for life by the regent with consent of the House of Commons
- There are four types of Lords:
 - Political Peers
 - Hereditary Peers
 - Anglican Bishops
 - “Crossbenchers” – Non-partisan policy experts

Why “Crossbenchers?”

- House of Lords has 3 rows of benches
- Partisan members sit on benches facing each other
- Non-partisan members sit in the center aisle

Three main roles of the House of Lords:

1. Question and challenge the work of the government
2. Work with the House of Commons to shape laws
3. Investigate issues through committees and debates

What about the judiciary?

- The House of Lords used to serve as the equivalent of the US Supreme Court – effectively serving as the chief judiciary body.
- Since 2009, that responsibility has fallen to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, which is not a part of Parliament.

House of Commons:

Elected Representatives of the People of the UK. Elected through a “First past the post” electoral system – the person with the most votes wins... even if he or she does not have a majority. Responsible for day-to-day legislation and governance. 650 constituencies with around 70,000 people in each constituency. The majority party, or coalition of minority parties’ equivalent to a majority in number has the responsibility for governing. This party is said to be “in government”.

The leader of the government is known as the Prime Minister. Since 2010, David Cameron has served as Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has the power to appoint cabinet ministers with each responsible for a set of political issues known as a “brief.” Maintaining a government can be difficult. In 2010, no party had an overall majority of the seats in the House of Commons. The Center-Right Conservatives and Centrist Liberal Democrats joined together to form a coalition government. In 2015, the Conservative Party won an outright majority.

Those parties that do not have a majority are known as the loyal opposition. The current opposition is led by Jeremy Corbyn of the Labour Party. The leader of the opposition appoints a “Shadow Cabinet” to cover the same briefs as the government. The Loyal Opposition gets the opportunity to ask questions of the Prime Minister every week on important policy issues. It can become raucous and exciting. The Benches... again? Like the House of Lords there are benches in the House of Commons. Leaders of government and opposition sit on the front of the benches, facing each other. Party members who are not in the leadership sit in the back benches. Frontbenchers vs. Backbenchers