

Politics of the United-Kingdom

Introduction :

The British political system is headed by a monarchy but the powers of the monarch as head of state - currently Queen Elizabeth II - are ceremonial. The most important power is the choice of the Member of Parliament to form a government, but the monarch follows the convention that this opportunity is granted to the leader of the political party with the most seats in the House of Commons (One part of the parliament)

The U.K. Parliament :

The British Parliament is dual : there are two houses or chambers. The House of Commons and The House of Lords. The British Parliament is often called Westminster because it is housed in a distinguished building in central London called the Palace of Westminster.

The House of Commons

This is the lower chamber but the one with the most authority.

The Commons is chaired by the Speaker. Unlike the Speaker in the US House of Representatives, the post is non-political and indeed, by convention, the political parties do not contest the Parliamentary constituency held by the Speaker.

Rather oddly (but deliberately), there is insufficient seating capacity in the chamber of the House of Commons for all the MPs. Members do not sit at desks (like most legislatures) but on long, green-covered benches and there is only seating capacity for 437 MPs out of the total of 650. The origin of this strange arrangement is that the Commons first home was the medieval St Stephen's Chapel in the Palace of Westminster which could only fit around 400 Members.

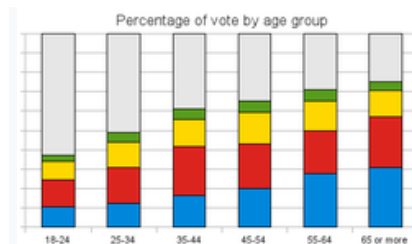
The House of Lords

This is the upper chamber but the one with less authority. Its main roles are to revise legislation and keep a check on government by scrutinising its activities. Since 1911, its power to block "money bills" is limited to one month and its power to block other bills is limited to one session, so

ultimately it cannot block the will of the House of Commons. Furthermore, since 1945, there has been the Salisbury Convention that the House of Lords will not oppose a measure that was specifically mentioned in the last election manifesto of the political party forming the Government.

Political parties in the UK

Since the 1920s the two main political parties in the UK, in terms of the number of seats in the House of Commons, are the Conservative and Unionist Party and the Labour Party.



2005 general election results by age group: voters for Conservative (blue), Labour (red), Lib Dem (yellow), other parties (green); and those not voting (grey).

The Conservative Party: long divided between the free-marketing neo-liberals on the far right, and consensual "one nation" pro-European Conservatives in the centre, is in chaos, following the resignation of two leading Brexiteer ministers from Theresa May's cabinet.

UKIP - The UK Independence Party: A sovereignist party that wants Britain to withdraw from the European Union. The party has little in the way of policies, apart from Europe-bashing, but is surprisingly popular with voters disgruntled with the perceived failures of the main parties.

The Labour Party : The Labour party covers virtually the whole spectrum of left wing politics in Britain, and includes a smaller party known as the Co-operative party. Until 2010, since the time of Tony Blair, it had been dominated by the social-liberal centre-left.

The Greens - The Green Party: A centre-left party, in many ways rather middle-class, committed to the promotion of environmental issues. One Member of Parliament (since 2010).