

Leggi e ascolta.

Politics in the UK

The UK is a democracy, but it has an unusual political system. So how does it work?

The Head of State



The UK doesn't have a president. Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State. She is not elected and she is not a politician. She doesn't make laws and she doesn't have any political power. She has to sign new laws, and she can't say 'no'. But she meets the Prime Minister, the leader of the biggest political party, in private every week, and they discuss policy.

The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister is the head of the government. He or she lives at a very famous address – Number 10 Downing Street. The Prime Minister chooses about 22 people from his or her party to be ministers in the 'Cabinet'. They meet every week and make important decisions. The government runs the country, takes decisions on taxation and proposes new laws, but it can't make laws – that's the job of parliament.



Parliament



Parliament is the most important part of the British political system. There are two Houses of Parliament at Westminster, in London: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The 659 members of the House of Commons are called Members of Parliament, or MPs, and the British people elect them every five years. The MPs in the House of Commons discuss new laws and vote Yes (for) or No (against) a new law. If most of the MPs vote Yes, the law goes to the House of Lords for consideration.

The members of the House of Lords are called Peers. There are about 800 of them, and the British people don't elect them. The Peers are all important or successful people, and they become members of the House of Lords for life. The House of Lords checks new laws, gives advice, and asks for changes. But it can't completely reject a law from the House of Commons.



Elections and political parties



Every five years, there is a general election in the UK to elect the MPs in the House of Commons. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are divided into 659 areas, called constituencies. Each constituency elects one MP. Everyone over 18 can vote.

After a general election, the political party with the most MPs forms the new government. Sometimes two or more parties have to form the government together. This is called a coalition government. But this is not usual in the UK. Normally only one political party runs the country, and the other political parties are in opposition.

Traditionally there are three major political parties: the Conservative Party (right), the Labour Party (left) and the Liberal Democrats (centre).



National and regional powers

There is also a Scottish Parliament, and Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies. People in these countries vote for their local MPs, and these MPs can make some local laws. For example, the school system is different in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But only the British parliament in Westminster can make laws for all of the UK.