

Contemporary political system

(Allied- Political science to History and Economics)

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Unit-2

Political system of the Great Britain

The history of the constitution of the United Kingdom concerns the evolution of UK constitutional law from the formation of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland to the present day. The history of the UK constitution, though officially beginning in 1800, traces back to a time long before the four nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland were fully formed.

The UK constitution is an accumulation of various statutes, judicial precedents, convention, treaties and other sources which collectively can be referred to as the British Constitution. It is thus more accurate to describe Britain's constitution as an 'uncodified' constitution, rather

than an 'unwritten' one. Important events in the history of England comprises of Civil war, Cromwell and commonwealth and some notable social reforms.

The **salient features of the British constitution** are as follows: Evolutionary, unitary, flexible, Parliamentary executive with sovereignty, mixed constitution, role of conventions and independence of judiciary.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was created on 1 January 1801, by the merger of the Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland under the Acts of Union 1800. The principle of ministerial responsibility to the lower House did not develop until the 19th century—the House of Lords was superior to the House of Commons both in theory and in practice. Members of the House of Commons (MPs) were elected in an antiquated electoral system, under which constituencies of vastly different sizes existed. Thus, the borough of Old Sarum, with seven voters, could elect two members, as could the borough of Dunwich, which had almost completely disappeared into the sea due to land erosion.

Many small constituencies, known as pocket or rotten boroughs, were controlled by members of the House of Lords, who could ensure the election of their relatives or supporters. During the reforms of the 19th century, beginning with the Reform Act 1832, the electoral system for the House of Commons was progressively regularised. No longer dependent on the Lords for their seats, MPs grew more assertive.

The **House of Commons** is the effective legislative authority in Great Britain. It alone has the right to impose taxes and to vote money to, or withhold it from, the various public departments and services. The House of Lords debates legislation, and has power to amend or reject bills. However, the power of the Lords to reject a bill passed by the House of Commons is severely restricted by the Parliament Acts.

For historical reasons, as a state made up of several separate jurisdictions, the United Kingdom does not have a single unified legal system. Instead, there is one system for England and Wales, another for Scotland, and a third for Northern Ireland.

The **rule of law** is one of the longest established common law fundamental principles of the governance of the United Kingdom, dating to Magna Carta of 1215,

particularly jurisprudence following its late 13th century re-drafting. It as a minimum subjects an otherwise absolute monarch (executive) and all free people within its jurisdictions, primarily those of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to legal doctrines known as the general principles of law. It has evolved to work only alongside equal application of the law to all free people 'equality before the law' and within the framework of the constitutional monarchy supports the legal doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty. Exactly what it entails beyond this and the way that different aspects of the rule of law principle are applied, depends on the specific situation and era.

The **King** is a person, whereas the **Crown** is an institution. The King is the physical embodiment of the Crown. The King is only a person using the powers of the Crown. All the powers of the State reside in the Crown as an institution. The Privy Council of the United Kingdom is a formal body of advisers to the sovereign of the United Kingdom. Its membership mainly comprises senior politicians who are current or former members of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. The **prime minister** of the United Kingdom (informally abbreviated to PM) is the head of government of the United Kingdom. The prime minister directs both the executive and the legislature, and together with their **Cabinet** is accountable to the monarch, to Parliament, to their party, and ultimately to the electorate, for the government's policies and actions. The office of prime minister is not established by any statute or constitutional document but exists only by long-established convention, whereby the reigning monarch appoints as prime minister the person most likely to command the confidence of the House of Commons, this individual is typically the leader of the political party or coalition of parties that holds the largest number of seats in that chamber. The position of prime minister was not created; it evolved slowly and organically over three hundred years due to numerous Acts of Parliament, political developments, and accidents of history. The office is therefore best understood from a historical perspective. The origins of the position are found in constitutional changes that occurred during the Revolutionary Settlement (1688–1720) and the resulting shift of political power from the Sovereign to Parliament. Although the sovereign was not stripped of the ancient prerogative powers and legally remained the head of government, politically it gradually became necessary for him or her to govern through a prime minister who could command a majority in Parliament.

The **Cabinet of the United Kingdom** is a group in the government of the United Kingdom, consisting of the highest ranking ministers of the Crown in the Parliament of the United Kingdom. A committee of the Privy Council, the members include the holders of the four Great Offices of State, including the prime minister, who chairs the Cabinet. Other members include the principal secretaries of state who each head the government departments. Local government in England operates under either a one tier system – unitary authorities, or a two tier system – county and district councils. There are five types of local authority in England: county councils, district councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs. The British political system is a **two party system**. Since the

1920s, the two dominant parties have been the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Before the Labour Party rose in British politics, the Liberal Party was the other major political party, along with the Conservatives. While coalition and minority governments have been an occasional feature of parliamentary politics, the first-past-the-post electoral system used for general elections tends to maintain the dominance of these two parties, though each has in the past century relied upon a third party, such as the Liberal Democrats, to deliver a working majority in Parliament. A Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government held office from 2010 until 2015, the first coalition since 1945. The coalition ended following parliamentary elections on 7 May 2015, in which the Conservative Party won an outright majority of 330 seats in the House of Commons, while their coalition partners lost all but eight seats.

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