UK Politics

Current Prime Minister (Labour Party): **Keir Starmer** (since July 2024)

1) Local politicians are elected for 4-year terms by local communities to represent their opinions. Elections are normally held on the first Thursday in May. Residents are told about the elections via TV, radio, mail and newspapers. Every constituency (area) has one or more polling (voting) stations where people can go at any time during the day (typically between 8am and 6pm). Each voter ticks their chosen representative on a piece of paper (a "voting slip") and puts it in the "urn". Elected politicians are announced the next day.

2) In the UK, General Elections take place every 5 years, but the ruling party can hold an election sooner. Candidates compete for a seat in the "House of Commons". General Elections in the UK are comprised of 650 individual local elections of Members of Parliament (MP) that take place on the same day. Each election is done in a "constituency" (similar to a "district" or "neighbourhood") and they are created so that each constituency has a similar number of voters. When a candidate wins a constituency, he/she wins a seat in the House of Commons. When a voter votes for a candidate, they are also voting for that political party. A party leader is elected by the party members. The leader of the winning party becomes the new Prime Minister (PM). The new PM must visit the king on his first day (the day after the election) to accept the new position formally. The outgoing PM must vacate 10 Downing Street immediately. The king formally opens the new parliament a few days later in a formal ceremony (see Parliament.mp4 or the full video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD7PdBoN8_o). “Black Rod” assists in the ceremony; more details at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-49647756.

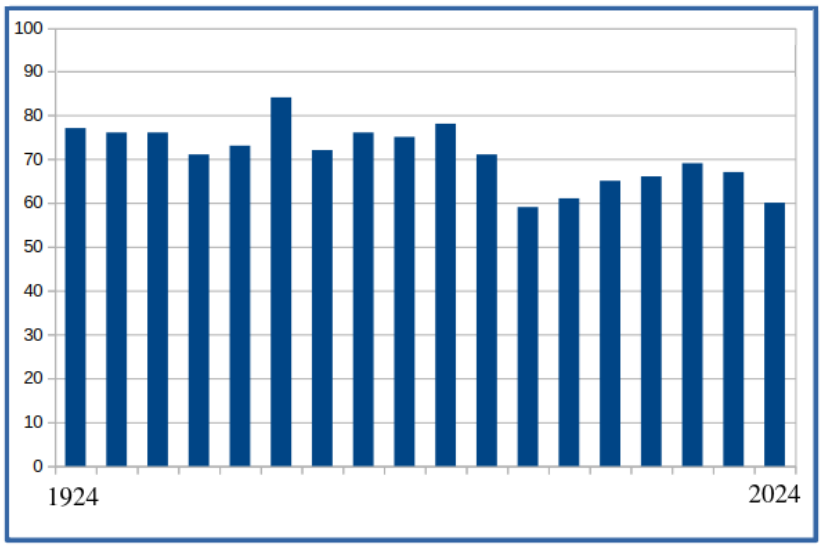
The 2024 General Election

In 2024, the Labour Party won an overwhelming majority in the UK Parliament, securing 412 seats in the UK Parliament (63%). However, in terms of the share of votes, only about 34% of voters voted for Labour. This discrepancy is due to the British electoral system, which is based on the “first past the post” principle. The country is divided into 650 constituencies, each holding their own contest to pick one Member of Parliament. Whoever wins the largest number of votes in their constituency becomes the MP – they don’t need to secure the majority in order to be elected. In fact, most MPs don’t. This means that the number of seats that a party wins doesn’t necessarily reflect its popularity across the country, something that has historically disadvantaged the smaller parties. For example, Reform, the UK’s right-wing party led by Nigel Farage, got 14% of the votes, but came first in only four constituencies, which means that they will take only four seats in the parliament, less than 1% of the seats. There have been campaigns to change the electoral systems to Proportional Representation (PR) over the years, but none have succeeded.

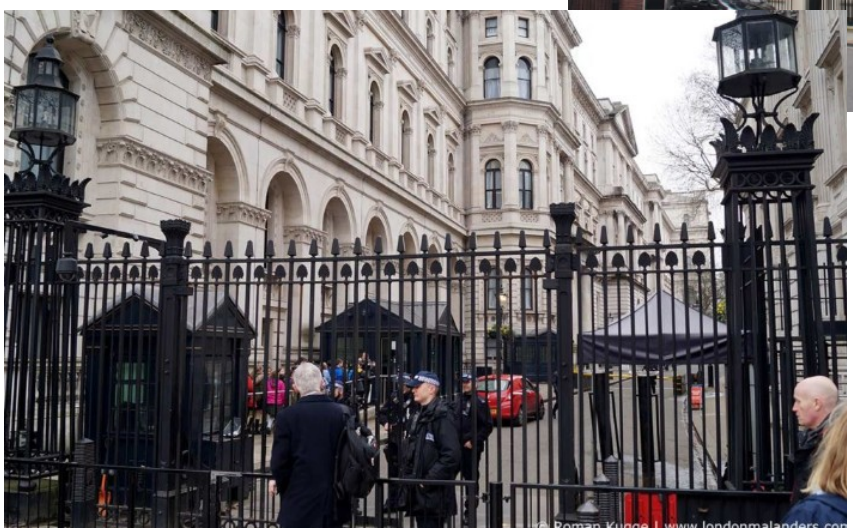
There are currently no electronic voting systems in the UK.

Political Parties (2024):	**Seats**	**Popular Vote**
• Labour	412 (63%)	34%
• Conservative	121 (19%)	24%
• Liberal Democrats	71 (11%)	12%
• Reform	4 (<1%)	14%
• Green	4 (<1%)	7%
• Plaid Cymru	4 (<1%)	(others – 9%)
• Scottish National Party (SNP)	9 (1.4%)	
• Sinn Féin	7 (1.1%)	
• Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	1 (<1%)	
• Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	5 (<1%)	

Optional voting
Voting in the UK is optional. In the 2024 election, 59.9% of the adult population voted. Here is a graph of the turnouts over the last 100 years.



Official address
The Prime Minister resides at 10 Downing Street, in the heart of London. It is in a small cul-de-sac with a gated entrance and security guards.



Important political figures:

1. (Baroness/Lady) Margaret Thatcher ("*The Iron Lady*") (1925-2013)

Margaret Thatcher was a British stateswoman, who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and Leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990. She was the longest-serving British prime minister of the 20th century and the first woman to hold that office. She was called "The Iron Lady", due to her uncompromising politics and leadership style. As Prime Minister, she implemented policies which became known as "Thatcherism".

2. (Sir) Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

Sir Winston Churchill was a British statesman, army officer, and writer. He was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945, when he led Britain to victory in the Second World War, and again from 1951 to 1955. Churchill represented five constituencies during his career as a Member of Parliament (MP). Ideologically an economic liberal and imperialist, for most of his career he was a member of the Conservative Party, which he led from 1940 to 1955, but from 1904 to 1924 was instead a member of the Liberal Party.

UK Parliament

The House of Commons

The House of Commons is the democratically elected house of the UK Parliament, responsible for making laws. The UK is divided into 650 parliamentary constituencies, and each one is represented by a Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Commons. One side of the "Chamber" has "benches" allocated to the governing party and the other side to the "Opposition" party or parties.

What is the House of Commons?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dS_SLF92e5A

The House of Lords

The House of Lords complements the work of the House of Commons. It has 782 members, called 'peers', and there are three different types: hereditary peers, bishops and elected peers. The Lords do not represent constituencies and many are not members of a political party. The Lords have much expertise and they scrutinise all issues meticulously, and consequently approve or reject new laws proposed by Parliament. They also check the work of the Government by questioning and debating decisions made by ministers and government departments. The UK public does not elect Members of the House of Lords. The members of the House of Lords report directly to the King. The King has absolute power over the country, but he rarely disagrees with the House of Lords.

What is the House of Lords? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U0LhurGWOc

A tour of the House of Lords: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sLZBWcPkIk

How the UK Parliament works
Parliament is an essential part of UK politics. Its main roles are:

- Examine and challenge the work of the government
- Consider, propose, debate and approve new laws
- Enable the government to adjust taxes

The UK public elects MPs to represent their interests and concerns. During an election, everyone votes for one candidate to be their local MP. MPs can help their constituents in a variety of ways, from making private enquiries on their behalf, to raising matters publicly in the House of Commons. MPs divide their time between working in Parliament, working in their constituency and working for their political party. Some MPs from the ruling party become government ministers with specific responsibilities, such as “Secretary of State” for Health or Defence.

When Parliament is “sitting” (meeting), MPs generally spend their time working in the House of Commons. This can include raising issues affecting their constituents, attending debates and voting on new laws. Most MPs are also members of committees, which look at specific issues in detail, such as government policy, new laws, and human rights. In their constituency, MPs often hold a “surgery” in their office, where local people can attend to discuss any matters that concern them. MPs also attend local events, visit schools and businesses and try to meet as many people as possible. This gives MPs more information about local issues, which they can discuss when they return to Westminster.

General elections. When Parliament is dissolved, every seat in the House of Commons becomes vacant and a general election is held. Over 50% of the Commons' seats must be won for a party to govern.

By-elections. A by-election takes place when a seat in the House of Commons becomes vacant between general elections (usually due to illness, death or retirement).