

UK: POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTIONS

The origin of the political parties in the UK dates back to the late 1670s, when the House of Commons was formed by two groups: the **Tories**, the aristocracy loyal to the Church and the King, and the **Whigs**, the party made of rich businessmen, merchants and landowners. Nowadays, the UK has a multi-party system even though the political scene has been dominated by the two major parties, the **Conservative** and the **Labour** parties, over the last 150 years.

The **Conservative Party** is a centre-right political party, born in the 1830s, but whose origin dates back to the Tories. The party is generally supported by landowners, businesspeople and the middle class. It is strong in wealthy parts of England, especially in the South, and in suburban and rural areas. It stands for free market and low taxation.

The **Labour Party** is a centre-left party, born in 1901, which emerged as the political expression of the trade unions and the working classes. It is supported by the working classes and is strong in the North of England, Scotland and Wales. Over the years it has moved from strict socialist ideas, such as state intervention in the economy, towards a democratic socialist party or New Labour.

The **Liberal Democratic Party**, born in 1988 from the merger of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, is the descendant of the Whigs. It is socially progressive and supports human rights and economic liberalism.

The **Green Party**, born in 1990, is a left-wing party whose primary focus is the environment.

UK: ELECTIONS

Each constituency in the UK elects one Member of Parliament (MP) to a seat in the House of Commons. The 2011 Fixed-term Parliament Act set the date of the last general election on Thursday 7h May 2015 and subsequent elections to be held on the first Thursday of May at five year intervals.

USA: POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTIONS

American politics has always been dominated by two major parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

The **Democratic Party** is a centre-left, liberal party, founded in 1828. It is progressive in social and economic matters and its voters mainly live in the North-East and West-Coast states. Franklin D. Roosevelt was an inspiration for the economic ideas of the party. The symbol of the party is a donkey.

The **Republican Party** is a centre-right, conservative party, founded in 1854. It is in favour of private business and social conservatism. The party became important thanks to Abraham Lincoln. The symbol of the party is an elephant.

Other parties are: the environmentalist **Green Party**, active since the 1980s, the **Libertarian Party**, founded in 1971 and in favour of free market and civil liberties, and the **Constitution Party** which is a far-right party.

USA: ELECTIONS

Congressional and presidential elections take place simultaneously every four years, and the intervening Congressional elections, which take place every two years, are called Mid-term elections.

The Senate is elected for a six-year term in dual-seat constituencies (2 from each state), with one-third being renewed every two years.

State laws and state constitutions, controlled by state legislatures, regulate elections at state level and local level such as county and city government positions.