

UK: POLITICAL SYSTEM

The United Kingdom is a **parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy**. **The Prime Minister** is **the Head of the Government**, controlled by a **Parliament** elected by the people. The Prime Minister forms the Government and appoints **the Cabinet**, a committee of ministers who are responsible for government policy. The UK does not have a real Constitution, but is governed by a set of statute laws, or **Acts of Parliament**, case laws (sentences made by judges), international treaties, and unwritten sources such as parliamentary conventions and royal prerogatives. The political system is organised in three branches: the **legislative, executive and judiciary** powers.

1. The **legislative** branch is represented by a bicameral Parliament which consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, both at Westminster. The main functions of Parliament are to pass laws, scrutinise government policy and administration, and discuss major issues affecting the country. The House of Commons has 646 MPs (Members of Parliament) who are elected in a general election every five years. The House of Lords has no fixed number of representatives, who are not elected.
2. The **executive** branch, or government, includes the Prime Minister and the other Ministers. The Prime Minister is responsible for government policies, overseas operations and government agencies.
3. The **judiciary** branch consists of law courts, both civil and criminal.

USA: POLITICAL SYSTEM

The United States are a **constitutional, federal and presidential republic**. The **President** is the **Head of State**. The **Constitution** is the supreme law of the country. It came into force in 1789 and consists of three parts:

1. the **Preamble** (i.e. a statement of purpose);
2. the **Articles** (concerning the organisation of the State);
3. the **27 Amendments** (the first 10 are called the Bill of Rights and guarantee individual liberties).

In the articles, the Constitution defines the separate branches of the government - legislative, executive and judicial -, their powers, and a system of checks and balances, so that no branch can dominate the others.

The **legislative** power is in the hands of the Congress, which is made up of two parts with similar functions: the **House of Representatives**, with 435 members elected every two years - the number for each state depending on the population -, and the **Senate**, with 100 members - two for each state - elected every six years. Legislation must be approved by both houses before it is signed into law by the President.

The **executive** branch consists of the President, Vice-President, 15 government departments and various agencies such as the **Central Intelligence Agency** (CIA), which collects information on foreign governments, and the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** (FBI), which investigates national and international crimes. The Secretary of State is the President's main advisor on foreign affairs.

The **judicial** branch is composed of the **Supreme Court** and other lower courts. The Supreme Court has final authority in interpreting the Constitution.

All of the above form the federal government, but each state has its own government and the power to collect taxes and make laws. The executive power is in the hand of a Governor. Each state has its own police force.