

Constitutional System in the UK

The Constitutional System in the UK is an important topic from which questions can be asked in the [IAS](#) exam. It forms a part of polity and international relations in the [UPSC](#) exam.

Executive Branch In UK

Executive branch: Chief of State: Queen ELIZABETH II (since 6 February 1952); Heir Apparent Prince CHARLES (son of the queen, born 14 November 1948)

Head of government: Prime Minister Theresa May (since 2016)

Cabinet: Cabinet of Ministers appointed by the prime minister

Elections: the monarchy is hereditary; following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or the leader of the majority coalition usually becomes the prime minister

Definition: This entry includes several subfields. Chief of the state includes the name and title of the titular leader of the country who represents the state at official and ceremonial functions but may not be involved with the day-to-day activities of the government. Head of government includes the name and title of the top administrative leader who is designated to manage the day-to-day activities of the government. For example, in the UK, the monarch is the chief of state, and the prime minister is the head of government. In the US, the president is both the chief of state and the head of government. Cabinet includes the official name for this body of high-ranking advisers and the method for selection of members. Elections include the nature of election process or accession to power, date of the last election, and date of the next election.

Election results include the percent of vote for each candidate in the last election.

Indian Parliamentary System

The parliamentary system of government has the following merits:

British Parliamentary System

The Parliamentary System of Britain has the following merits:

1. Harmony Between Legislature and Executive The greatest advantage of the parliamentary system is that it ensures harmonious relationship and cooperation between the legislative and executive organs of the government. The executive is a part of the legislature and both are interdependent at work. As a result, there is less scope for disputes and conflicts between the two organs.

1. The responsibility of the Executive and Legislature-The most characteristic feature of the parliamentary form of government is the responsibility of the Executive to the Legislature.

2. Responsible Government By its very nature, the parliamentary system establishes a responsible government. The ministers are responsible to the Parliament for all their acts of omission and commission. The Parliament exercises control over the ministers through various devices like question hour, discussions, adjournment motion, no-confidence motion, etc.

2.Cabinet and Monarch- The Cabinet as the head of the Executive is answerable to the Parliament for its acts of omissions and commissions. The Monarch is the nominal head of the State. He/she acts on the advice of the ministers, who are responsible to the Parliament.

3. Prevents Despotism Under this system, the executive authority is vested in a group of individuals (council of ministers) and not in a single person. This dispersal of authority checks the dictatorial tendencies of the executive. Moreover, the executive is responsible to the Parliament and can be removed by a no confidence motion.

3. Confidence of the House of Commons-The Cabinet remains in power as long as it enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons. Whenever the Cabinet loses the support of the majority members, it resigns or advises the King to dissolve the House of Commons in order to have a fresh election; In the new election, if the Cabinet gets the majority it continues in office; otherwise it resigns in favour of a new government.

4. Ready Alternative Government In case the ruling party loses its majority, the Head of the State can invite the opposition party

4. Ministers as Homogenous Pol. Party-All the ministers are collectively responsible to the House of Commons. They swim or sink together.

5. Wide Representation- In a parliamentary system, the executive consists of a group of individuals (i.e., ministers who are representatives of the people). Hence, it is possible to provide representation to all sections and regions in the government. The prime minister while selecting his ministers can take this factor into consideration

5. Combination of Political Parties-The Ministers are also preferably from a homogeneous political party, or a combination of political parties having identical views and policies.

Legislative Branch In UK

Legislative branch: Bicameral Parliament consists of House of Lords; note – membership is not fixed (788 seats; consisting of approximately 670 life peers, 92 hereditary peers, and 26 clergy – as of 1 April 2012) and House of Commons (650 seats since 2010 elections; members elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms unless the House is dissolved earlier)

Elections: House of Lords – no elections (note – in 1999, as provided by the House of Lords Act, elections were held in the House of Lords to determine the 92 hereditary peers who would remain there; elections are held only as vacancies in the hereditary peerage arise); House of Commons – last held on 6 May 2010 (next to be held by June 2015)

Election results: House of Commons – percent of vote by party – Conservative 36.1%, Labor 29%, Liberal Democrats 23%, other 11.9%; seats by party – Conservative 305, Labor 258, Liberal Democrat 57, other 30

Definition: This entry contains information on the structure (unicameral, bicameral, tricameral), formal name, number of seats, and term of office. Elections include the nature of the election process or accession to power, date of the last election, and date of the next election. Election results includes the percent of vote and/or number of seats held by each party in the last election.

India Models And British Models Compared

Indian Models	British Models
India has a republican system in place of British monarchical system. the Head of the State in India (that is, President) is elected,	The Head of the State in Britain (that is, King or Queen) enjoys a hereditary position.
The Parliament is not supreme in India and enjoys limited and restricted powers due to a written Constitution, federal system, judicial review and fundamental rights	The British system is based on the doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament

In India, the prime minister may be a member of any of the two Houses of Parliament	In Britain, the prime minister should be a member of the Lower House (House of Commons) of the Parliament.
In India, a person who is not a member of Parliament can also be appointed as minister, but for a maximum period of six months	the members of Parliament alone are appointed as ministers in Britain
India has no such system. Unlike in Britain, the ministers in India are not required to countersign the official acts of the Head of the State	Britain has the system of legal responsibility of the minister
There is no such institution in India	'Shadow cabinet' is a unique institution of the British cabinet system. It is formed by the opposition party to balance the ruling cabinet and to prepare its members for future ministerial office.

Judicial Branch In UK

Judicial branch: Supreme Court of the UK (established in October 2009 taking over appellate jurisdiction formerly vested in the House of Lords is the final court of appeal); Senior Courts of England and Wales (comprising the Court of Appeal, the High Court of Justice, and the Crown Courts); Court of Judicature (Northern Ireland); Scotland's Court of Session and High Court of the Justiciary.
Definition: This entry contains the name(s) of the highest court(s) and a brief description of the selection process for members.

Local Govt In UK

Local Government Structure 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. County councils cover the whole of the county and provide the majority of public services in their particular area. County councils are responsible for: education, highways, transport planning, passenger transport, social care, libraries, waste disposal and strategic planning.

London boroughs Each London borough is a unitary authority. However, the Greater London Authority (GLA) provides London-wide government and shares responsibility for certain services. London boroughs are responsible for: education, highways, transport planning, social care, housing,

libraries, leisure and recreation, environmental health, waste collection, waste disposal, planning applications, strategic planning, local taxation collection. The GLA is responsible for highways, transport planning, passenger transport and strategic planning.

District councils Each county is divided into several districts. District councils, which may also be called borough councils or city councils if the district has borough or city status, cover a much smaller area and provide more local services.

District Councils are responsible for housing, leisure and recreation, environmental health, waste collection, planning applications and local taxation collections.

Unitary authorities Many large towns and cities and some small counties are unitary authorities; i.e. they have only one tier of local government. Unitary authorities can be city councils, borough councils, county councils, or district councils. Unitary authorities are responsible for: education, highways, transport planning, passenger transport, social care, housing, libraries, leisure and recreation, environmental health, waste collection, waste disposal, planning applications, strategic planning and local taxation collection.

Metropolitan districts Metropolitan districts are unitary authorities; they can be called metropolitan district councils, metropolitan borough councils or metropolitan city councils. Metropolitan districts are responsible for: education, highways, transport planning, passenger transport, social care, housing, libraries, leisure and recreation, environmental health, waste collection, waste disposal, planning applications, strategic planning and local taxation collection.

Town and parish councils Some parts of England have a third tier of local government. Town and parish councils are responsible for smaller local services such as parks, community centres, allotments and war memorials. In both Wales and Scotland there is a single tier system of local government providing all local government services. In Northern Ireland there are elected local borough, city and district councils which provide services such as waste disposal, street cleaning and recreation; however the majority of services are the responsibility of other organisations.

Political Party System In UK

Nearly all MPs represent political parties. The party with the most MPs after a general election normally forms the Government. The next largest party becomes the official Opposition. If an MP does not have a political party, they are known as an 'Independent'. Members of the House of Lords are organised on a party basis in much the same way as the House of Commons but with important differences: Members of the Lords do not represent constituencies and many are not members of a political party. Lords who do not support one of the three main parties are known as Crossbenchers or Independent Peers. There is also a small number who are not affiliated to any of the main groups.

History of the party system The system of political parties, which has existed in one form or another since at least the 18th century, is an essential element in the working of the constitution. Since the Second World War, all the Governments in the UK have been formed by either the Labour Party or the Conservative Party.

Opposition parties The effectiveness of the party system in Parliament depends on the relationship between the Government and the Opposition parties. In general, Opposition parties aim to:

- contribute to the creation of policy and legislation through constructive criticism
- oppose government proposals they disagree with
- put forward their own policies in order to improve their chances of winning the next general election

Where do MPs sit in the Commons? MPs from the same party tend to sit together in the House of Commons Chamber. The Chamber is a rectangular shape so the Government and the Opposition can face each other. The Government sits on the benches to the right of the Speaker. The official Opposition and MPs from other parties sit on the benches to the left of the Speaker.

Where do Members of the Lords sit in the Lords? As in the Commons, the Government and the Opposition face each other. The Government and the Bishops sit on the right of the Lord Speaker. The Opposition parties sit on the benches to the left of the Lord Speaker while the Crossbench Peers sit mostly on benches that cross the Chamber of the House of Lords behind the clerks' table.

Crossing the floor

Members of either the House of Commons or House of Lords can change political party at any time – known as 'crossing the floor'. The term comes from the fact that, traditionally, Members of Parliament from opposing parties sit on opposite sides of the Chamber. Therefore, a Member who changes party usually has to cross the floor of the House to sit on the other side of the Chamber. The term is used to signify the changing of allegiance.

Frontbenchers and backbenchers

In both the Commons and the Lords, Government ministers and Opposition shadow ministers sit on the front benches and are known as 'frontbenchers'. MPs and Members of the Lords who do not hold ministerial positions sit towards the back of the Chamber and are known as 'backbenchers'.

Independent MPs and Crossbench and Independent Lords MPs and Members of the Lords do not have to belong to a political party. Instead, MPs can sit as Independents and Lords can sit as Crossbenchers or Independents.

Bishops in the Lords The Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishops of Durham, London and Winchester and the 21 other senior diocesan bishops of the Church of England have seats in the Lords. This is for historical reasons. When they retire as bishops their membership of the House ends.

Also see:

[Constitutional Experiments Under the British Crown-\(1857-1947\)](#)

[Background of Constitution of India](#)

[Constituent Assembly of India](#)
