

## The UK political system

The UK's system of government is a **constitutional / parliamentary monarchy** known as the **Westminster system**. The British monarch, currently **His Majesty King Charles III**, the eldest son of Queen Elizabeth II, is the **head of state**. The Crown holds some executive powers called **Royal Prerogative**. One of them is the **appointment and dismissal of the Prime Minister** who is the **head of His Majesty's government**, which exercises executive power.

In fact, after an election, **the government is formed by the party with the biggest number of Members of Parliament** (MPs) in the House of Commons. The leader of this party is appointed **Prime Minister** by the monarch. Thus, unlike "separation of powers" based systems (Cf. France or the United States), in the UK the executive power (held by the government) is not separate from the legislative power (held by the Parliament). This is often referred to as the **fusion of powers**.

The Monarch is by tradition **Commander-in-Chief** of the British Armed Forces. He / She may declare war or sign treaties. In reality, the declaration of war (Cf. against Iraq in 2003) and the signing of treaties are done by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Crown.

Today, the British Monarch mainly plays a **ceremonial** role and has little power because the UK actually works on the basis of **parliamentary supremacy**. The **Parliament** of the United Kingdom is composed of **two legislative chambers**: The **House of Commons** (the **lower** house) whose members are **elected**, and the **House of Lords** (the **upper** house) whose members are **mainly appointed**. Membership of the House of Lords is made up of **Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal**. Lords Spiritual are representatives of the **Church of England**. So unlike in France, there is no strict separation of church and state.

The collective decision-making body of **HM's government** is called the **Cabinet**. It is composed of the **Prime Minister and the Cabinet ministers** he/she has selected. A **Secretary of State** is a Cabinet Minister **in charge of a Government Department**.

For example:

- Secretary of State for the Home Department (= the Home Secretary)
- Secretary of State for Education
- Secretary of State for Defence
- Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Secretary of State for Scotland, etc.

A Secretary of State is senior to a Minister of State.

**HM's Treasury** is not headed by a Secretary of State but by the **Chancellor of the Exchequer**.

The **shadow Cabinet** is an **alternative Cabinet** formed by **the leader of the Opposition**. The **shadow Ministers** *shadow*, or mark each individual member of the Cabinet. It is the shadow Cabinet's responsibility to **criticize** the policies of the government and to offer an **alternative** programme.

In the House of Commons, **Government ministers and shadow ministers** occupy the front seats and are described as "**frontbenchers**". A **backbencher** is a Member of Parliament (MP) or a legislator who does not hold governmental office and is not a Front Bench spokesperson in the Opposition.

# UK Fusion/Separation of Powers

## Elected Legislature & The Executive

### The House of Commons



**Primary Role**  
Creates/Designs Laws  
Scrutinizes/Approves Laws  
**Represents**  
The Will of the People

### HM Government



**Primary Role**  
Puts forward Laws  
Runs Government  
**Represents**  
The Will of the Majority

The Largest  
Party  
then forms:

## The Crown

### The Monarch



**Primary Role**  
Represents the UK  
Signs Bills into Law  
**Represents**  
Ceremony/Tradition

## Appointed Legislature

### The House of Lords



**Primary Role**  
Scrutinizes/Approves Laws  
Acts as a Safeguard  
**Represents**  
The Unwritten Constitution

## Judiciary

### The UK Courts of Law



**Primary Role**  
Upholds the Law  
**Represents**  
The Rule of Law