



United Kingdom — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[In this case we use the name the country is commonly referred to. This is so because the official title and hence the historical name of the country changed over time. Until 1918 it was officially the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and from then on the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.¹]

01/01/1801 Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy: The United Kingdom, as known today, was created in 1707 with the Acts of Union that united the Kingdom of England (including Wales) and the Kingdom of Scotland. This unification resulted in forming of a single legislative body, the Parliament of Great Britain.² Nonetheless, certain elements remained separate, such as Scottish and English law and the education systems of both countries.³ The removal of voting rights based on religion occurred with the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1791 in the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland. Since then the right to vote has never been based on race or religion.⁴ On 01/01/1801, Great Britain and Ireland united to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and created a legislative Union, the Parliament of the United Kingdom, through the Act of Union 1800.⁵ Until the late eighteenth century, ministers served as advisors to the sovereign, whose decision they were obliged to follow. However, the enactment of the Catholic Emancipation in 1829 marked the decline of the sovereign's independent political power. The Reform Act of 1832 significantly impacted constitutional monarchy, expanding the franchise, giving rise to the modern party system, and effectively reducing the sovereign's influence in general elections. In 1868, prime minister Disraeli resigned without seeking parliament's audience, recognizing that public opinion, rather than the House of Commons, held the power to form and dissolve governments. This resolved the long-standing conflict between the sovereign and parliament: It became evident that a government, even with the backing of the House of Commons, needed to gain the support of the voters. The sovereign could no longer sway voters to elect their preferred choice as prime minister (Bogdanor 1995: 27). After Queen Victoria's passing in 1901, no sovereign was able to veto a minister's appointment. As a result, the monarchy assumed the role of a politically neutral mediator between parties, as demonstrated by George V in 1914 regarding Irish Home Rule and in 1915 regarding conscription (Bogdanor 1995). Up until 1918 there was no universal male suffrage. Voting rights were linked to property.⁶ We code the regime in this period as an electoral oligarchy rather than a constitutional monarchy since the sovereign lacked significant political power and was not in a position to appoint the prime minister to rule on their behalf. Instead, the prime minister was chosen through parliamentary elections, albeit with limited suffrage, and ceremonially accepted by the monarch. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Elections were already competitive according to LIED. V-Dem's CEI indicates somewhat cleanliness scores. The overall election conditions were already free and fair following V-Dem's EF&FI. LDI scores are moderate. The decisive reason for the classification is the very exclusive suffrage. Nevertheless, according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI the country already guaranteed full political liberties until 1914. For the remaining years of this regime period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative

constraints on the executive were robust.

12/14/1918 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy: All adult men in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland were enfranchised by the Representation of the People Act 1918.⁷ This Act granted women over 30 the right to vote in national elections, but about 60% of women (those under 30 or not meeting property qualifications) were excluded until the Equal Franchise Act 1928, when all women were granted the vote on the same terms as men in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. For our regime change events we code the commencement of the Representation of the People Act 1918 as a strategic restructuring. After the general elections on 12/14/1918, the Irish party Sinn Féin won most Irish seats in the parliament but refused to take them. Instead, they formed the First Dáil parliament in Dublin and ratified a declaration of independence on 01/21/1919. Subsequently, the Anglo-Irish war was fought between the Crown forces and the Irish Republic Army. The conflict concluded with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty on 12/06/1921, establishing the Irish Free State. Consequently, six counties in the north formed Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom. In 1927, Britain officially adopted the name "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" through the Royal and Parliamentary Titles Act 1927.⁸ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED classifies the elections as competitive. In addition, the election process maintained its somewhat cleanliness scores (V-Dem CEI). However, freedom and fairness were given per V-Dem's EF&FI. In the specified timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as present, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are present. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. Until 1922, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1923 onwards, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. Since 1920 the LIED lists the United Kingdom with a somewhat score, classifying it as a democracy. Though in the time since 01/01/1900 democratic equal participation was severely constrained, which is taken into account by our classification, governmental power alternated between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, underscoring the competitive character of the national elections.⁹

05/30/1929 End (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: In the parliamentary election on this date (referred to as the "Flapper Election"), for the first time, women aged 21 to 29 had the right to vote, owing to the Representation of the People Act 1928, adopted on 07/02/1928.¹⁰ However, only the Representation of the People Act 1948 removed plural voting rights held by about 7% of the electorate. Hence, between 1929 and 1948 there were still severe deficits regarding equal participation in the United Kingdom. When the 1929 national elections did not lead to one party gaining the majority in parliament, the Labour Party formed a minority government with support from the Liberal Party, indicating that parliamentary work is still possible without an absolute majority. During the Second World War under the Churchill Government (05/10/1940 to 05/23/1945), even though the Conservative Party had a majority in parliament, it was considered more efficient to create "National Government" including the oppositional Labour Party and Liberal Party which indicates that in times of crises compromise-oriented politics were favored against party politics.¹¹ The Representation of the People Act 1969 reduced the voting age from 21 to 18. In the 1960s, Northern Ireland's unionist prime minister, Terence O'Neill, attempted reforms to grant Catholics a greater political voice. On 10/05/1968, a march organized by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in Derry sparked the onset of the Northern Ireland Conflict, also known as "The Troubles". This period saw escalating violence between nationalists (predominantly Catholic republicans) seeking Irish reunification and unionist (mostly Protestant loyalists) desiring to remain part of the United Kingdom. Consequently, British authorities suspended Northern Ireland's parliament and implemented direct rule. In the 1990s, the Irish Republican Army's failure to gain widespread public support or achieve their goal of British withdrawal led to negotiations that resulted in the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast

Agreement) on 04/10/1998, establishing a power-sharing arrangement within the Northern Ireland Assembly.¹² The holding of referendums in Scotland and Wales on 09/11/1997 and 09/18/1997, respectively, resulted in the passage of the Scotland Act 1998 and the Government of Wales Act 1998, establishing the devolved Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales in 1999.¹³ Within the UK's system of devolution, Parliament has delegated varying levels of legislative authority to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly, and the Scottish Parliament, thereby enhancing the political representation of regional populations.¹⁴ As of 2019, 529,902 British nationals (257,646 people in Crown Dependencies and 272,256 people in British Overseas Territories) are represented in local legislatures in their territories but not in the House of Commons unless they are residents in the United Kingdom.¹⁵ The political system of the United Kingdom is a multi-party system in which elections are held regularly. The parliament is bicameral, consisting of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The members of the House of Commons are directly elected to serve five-year terms. The ceremonial head of state is the monarch. Although the government upholds strong safeguards for political rights and civil liberties, there have been growing concerns regarding government surveillance of residents, as well as an increase in Islamophobia.¹⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to FH, for the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI confirm that political liberties were present. However, in the time of World War II LIED scores their absence. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. Between 1931 and 1963, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. Since 1964, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive. On 07/04/2024, general elections were held, marking the Labour Party's first victory in a general election since 2005 and ending the Conservative Party's fourteen-year tenure as the main governing party.¹⁷ Ever since the country's democratic transition the elections score constant competitiveness according to LIED. Since 1932 the elections reach a continuous cleanliness (V-Dem CEI). Moreover, freedom and fairness for the elections maintain (V-Dem EF&FI).

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Bagehot 1867, Fröhlich 1997, Garrard 2000, Jennings 1966, Kaiser 2002, McKibbin 2007, Rose/Munro 2010, Sturm 2009)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1707

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_Kingdom

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Relief_Act_1791

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_Kingdom

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representation_of_the_People_Act_1918

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representation_of_the_People_Act_1918

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_Kingdom

⁹ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, United Kingdom_R: 1

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1929_United_Kingdom_general_election

¹¹ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, United Kingdom_V: 1

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997_Welsh_devolution_referendum https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_devolution

¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-kingdom/freedom-world/2022>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

¹⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-kingdom/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_United_Kingdom_general_election

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