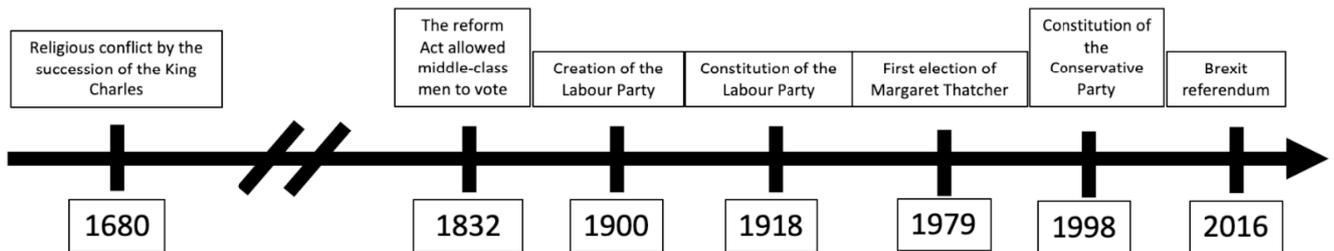


Political parties in the UK

Key ideas:

- Two main parties: The Labour Party and the Conservative Party (the Tories). The first one believes that the government should help to reduce inequalities. On the other hand, the Tory Party believes in the central role of the individual: private sector should prevail over the public one.
- Elections occur every five years. The seats are split between the different countries (majority for the England) and the number of **MPs** per party is decided proportionally to the votes that each party received.

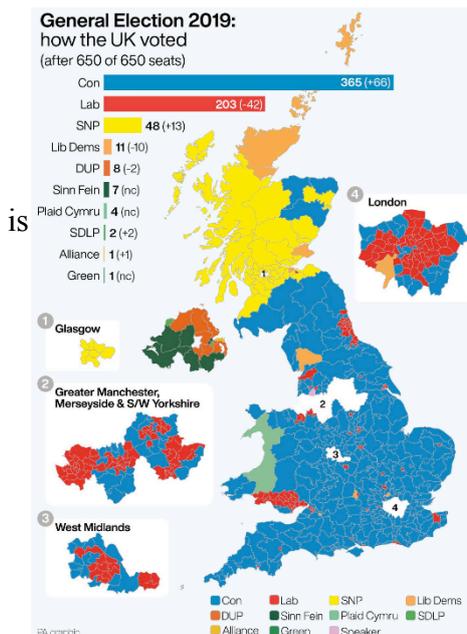


The two main parties originally emerged from a conflict that happened in the seventeenth century. This conflict opposed the Tories and the Whigs (word of abuse): they were the two political forces that were disagreeing about who should be crowned after King Charles (no direct heir). His brother James was a logical choice, but his wife was Catholic which in a protestant country is not well seen. After disagreements, he was finally made king but attracted the discontentment of the people. He was deposed and his son-in-law (who was protestant) was crowned but must abandon the monarchy. In 1832, The Reform Act allowed the middle-class men to **cast a ballot**. The Conservative Party was officially created out of the Tory party in 1834 and in 1900 the modern Labour party emerged and since then these two political parties rule alternatively the country.

These parties have different views on the economical and political ways of ruling the country:

For the Conservative Party, the government does not need to interfere in the economy and private sector should prevail over the public one, private property, family, religion and monarchy are also at the core of their philosophy. Among their notable leader was Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher (the iron lady) who became the first female prime minister in 1979 and known for her radical political choices in a period of crisis. The party is known divided over EU membership.

On the other hand, the Labour Party believes that the government should help to reduce inequalities and achieve social justice; it should provide for the poorest citizens, through welfare support and public sector jobs and believes in trade unions. In the 1970s, Tony Blair revamped the party because the recession dealt a severe blow to the party. The party followed centrist policies for years but in 2016, Jeremy Corbyn, a very radical Labour member, was elected as leader of the party.



Parliamentary general elections are held every five years in the UK and 650 seats are up to grabs – 533 for England, 59 for Scotland, 40 for Wales and 18 for Northern Ireland. In 1997 and 1998, referendums took place in order to transfer power from the UK to the countries through institutions. The UK has a “first past the post system”, based on relative

majority which means the winner takes it all in every **constituency**. The party that wins the most seats form the new government, and the leader becomes the prime minister. The opposition is mainly formed by the shadow cabinet which is the next largest party in term of **MPs**. The financing of the political parties is controversial: it comes from their **membership subscriptions**, but these are not enough, so the Conservative Party relies on private donations while Labour receives financial help from trade unions meaning that the finances of a party rely heavily on the wealth of their supporters.

Over the past few years, the political landscape has been reshaped by the growth of smaller parties as for example the Liberal Democrats which is not far from the two dominant parties. In 2010 this fragmentation led to an unprecedented situation: neither Labour nor Tories won a clear majority and a coalition had to be formed. One needs to bear in mind that nationalist claims in some art of the UK have favoured the emergence and the rise of parties that call for the independence of their countries. For example, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) is the largest political party in Scotland. Brexit increased the will of countries to break away from the UK.

Vocabulary:

To cast a ballot

MP (member of parliament)

Membership subscriptions

A constituency

To run for office

A hardliner

A platform

Voter

Un député

Une cotisation

Une circonscription

Se présenter aux élections

Un jusqu'au-boutiste

Un programme électoral