

The British political system is a “constitutional monarchy”, where the Sovereign and Head of State of the United Kingdom, referred to as “The Crown”, shares power with a constitutionally organized government. Unlike in an absolute monarchy, the power of the King or Queen is restricted under the laws of the nation.

The British have always felt proud of this system. In a recent poll published in the Guardian under the title *Queen Enjoys Record Support* (24 May 2012), 69% of the British respondents (1) claimed that Great Britain would **be worse off** without the monarchy against 22% who believed it would **be better off**. Few people then in the mainstream (2) political debate believe that the Monarchy should be abolished but the fact is that people often consider the whole Royal Family as mere celebrities even though the Queen’s royal prerogatives (3) are not solely symbolic and ceremonial.

The British Sovereign holds several critical roles on the political scene:

- The Queen is above all the source of all legislative and executive power.

The first scene of the movie *The Queen* directed by Stephen Frears recalls one of the Queen’s main prerogatives which is to appoint the Prime Minister. In this scene, she seems to take pleasure in reminding Tony Blair that he may just have won an overwhelming majority in the 1997 general election, he cannot serve as Prime Minister until she appoints him. Likewise, the last scene of that movie illustrates one of the key constitutional roles the Monarch has in Great Britain which consists in a weekly meeting with the Prime Minister in order to “advise, guide and warn” the government.

- As The Queen in Parliament (*formal title*), she can **dissolve** Parliament and **call for** new elections. She opens parliamentary sessions with *The Queen’s Speech* and announces **forthcoming** legislation (dictated by the Prime Minister). All bills and acts passed must be assented by (4) the Crown although no sovereign has imposed a veto since 1708.
- The Queen is also the Head of the Armed Forces and can thus alone declare war and peace.
- The Queen is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and on advice of the Prime Minister she appoints the Bishops and Archbishops.
- As the Fountain of Justice (*Formal Title*), the Queen is entitled to appoint senior magistrates (on the Prime Minister’s advice) and to **issue Pardons and Mercies**.
- She is also the Head of the Commonwealth and head of state in 16 of the 53 Commonwealth member countries.

## The British Monarchy

In addition to this actual political power, the Monarchy has offered the story of a dynasty. British tabloids have become obsessed with the Royal Family and their lives. In June 2012, Queen Elisabeth II celebrated her 60th anniversary on the throne, her **Diamond Jubilee, in pomp and circumstance** which was celebrated nationwide and widely broadcast on the media. Prince William and Kate Middleton have also become global celebrities. Some two billion people followed their marriage ceremony in April 2011 on TV and social networks and in July 2013, everyone cheered the birth of the Royal Baby, Prince George of Cambridge (George Alexander Louis). This is a time of record popularity for the House of Windsor. It is a far cry from 1992, the “*annus horribilis*” as the Queen referred to it, when fairytale weddings gave way to the divorces of both Prince Charles and Prince Andrew. Although the conduct of the Royal Family – Prince Harry’s latest game of strip billiards, for example – is still highly controversial, the Royal Family benefits today from solid support.

The well-being of this **beloved** (5) institution is certainly due to its ability to benefit from contemporary influence and to modernize itself. A case in point is the *Succession to the Crown Act 2013* which received royal assent after having been passed by both Houses of Parliament in April 2013. It modifies the laws governing the succession in the UK, allowing girls to succeed to the throne with rights equal to those of boys. It also enables the Monarch to marry a Roman Catholic although the rule that reserves the throne to Protestants has not been abolished.

It seems that the Crown enjoys solid support for now and modernizing it will probably keep it safe for some time, at least until Queen Elizabeth II passes away. Then 48% of the British say they distrust Prince Charles. Most of them would rather **skip** (6) a generation to see Prince William inherit directly.



### Vocabulary

1. respondent : *personne sondée, interrogée* ; 2. mainstream : *opinion / courant majoritaire* ; 3. royal prerogative : *prérogative royale / droit du monarque* ; 4. be assented by (to) : *recevoir le consentement royal* ; 5. beloved : *bien-aimé / chéri / adoré* ; 6. skip (to) : *sauter (une génération)*.