

United Kingdom

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**, commonly known as the **United Kingdom** (UK) or **Britain**,^[k] is a country in Northwestern Europe, off the coast of the continental mainland.^{[13][14]} It comprises England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.^{[1][15]} The UK includes the island of Great Britain, the north-eastern part of the island of Ireland, and most of the smaller islands within the British Isles.^[16] Northern Ireland shares a land border with the Republic of Ireland; otherwise, the United Kingdom is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the English Channel, the Celtic Sea, and the Irish Sea. The total area of the United Kingdom is 94,354 square miles (244,376 km²),^{[d][7]} with an estimated population of nearly 67.6 million people in 2022.^[8]

In 1707, the Kingdom of England (which included Wales) and the Kingdom of Scotland united under the Treaty of Union to create the Kingdom of Great Britain. The Acts of Union 1800 incorporated the Kingdom of Ireland to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. Most of Ireland seceded from the UK in 1922 as the Irish Free State, and the Royal and Parliamentary Titles Act 1927 created the present name, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The UK became the first industrialised country and was the world's foremost power for the majority of the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly during the "Pax Britannica" between 1815 and 1914.^{[17][18]} At its height in the 1920s, the British Empire encompassed almost a quarter of the world's landmass and population, and was the largest empire in history. However, its involvement in the First World War and the Second World War damaged Britain's economic power and a global wave of decolonisation led to the independence of most British colonies.^{[19][20][21]} British influence can be observed in the legal and political systems of many of its former colonies, and British culture remains globally influential, particularly in language, literature, music and sport. English is the world's most widely spoken language and the third-most spoken native language.^[22]

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

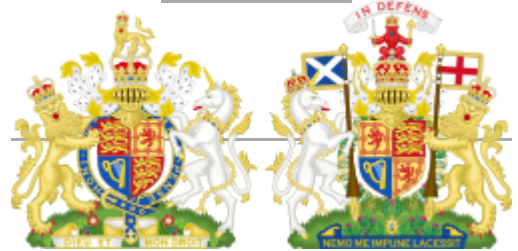


Flag

Anthem: "God Save the King"^[a]



Coats of arms:



Used in relation to Scotland (right) and elsewhere (left)



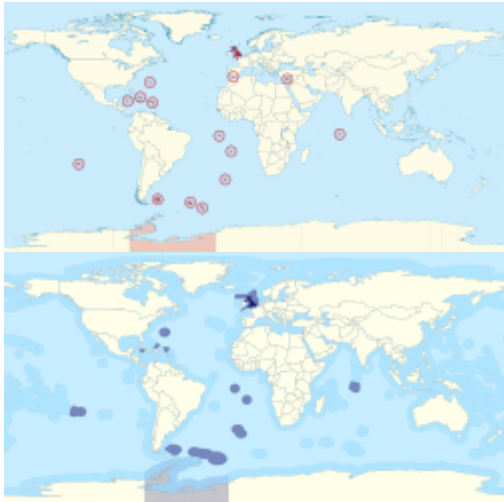
The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy.^{[m][24]} The UK has three distinct jurisdictions; England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.^[25] Since 1998, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own devolved governments and legislatures while England is governed directly by the UK Government.^[26] The capital and largest city of the United Kingdom is London. Other major cities include Birmingham, Liverpool, Nottingham, Sheffield, Bristol, Glasgow and Leicester.^[27] Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland's national capital cities are Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, respectively.

The UK has the world's sixth-largest economy by nominal gross domestic product (GDP), and the ninth-largest by purchasing power parity. It is a recognised nuclear state and is ranked fourth globally in military expenditure.^{[28][29]} The UK has been a permanent member of the UN Security Council since its first session in 1946. It is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the Council of Europe, the G7, the OECD, NATO, the Five Eyes, AUKUS and the CPTPP.

Etymology and terminology

The Acts of Union 1707 declared that the Kingdom of England and Kingdom of Scotland were "United into One Kingdom by the Name of Great Britain".^{[n][30]} The term "United Kingdom" has occasionally been used as a description for the former Kingdom of Great Britain, although its official name from 1707 to 1800 was simply "Great Britain".^[31] The Acts of Union 1800 united the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801, forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Following the partition of Ireland and the independence of the Irish Free State in 1922, which left Northern Ireland as the only part of the island of Ireland within the United Kingdom, the name was changed in 1927 to the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland".^[32]

Although the United Kingdom is a sovereign country, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also widely referred to as countries.^[33] The UK Prime Minister's website has used the phrase "countries within a country" to describe the United Kingdom.^[34] Some statistical summaries, such as those for the twelve NUTS 1 regions refer to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as "regions".^[35] Northern Ireland



Capital and largest city	<u>London</u> 51°30'N 0°7'W
National language	<u>English</u> (<i>de facto</i>)
Regional and minority languages ^[b]	<u>Scots</u> • <u>Ulster Scots</u> • <u>Welsh</u> • <u>Cornish</u> • <u>Scottish Gaelic</u> • <u>Irish</u> • <u>British Sign Language</u>
Ethnic groups (2011)	87.1% <u>White</u> 7.0% <u>Asian</u> 3.0% <u>Black</u> 2.0% <u>Mixed</u> 0.9% other
Demonym(s)	<u>British</u> • <u>Briton</u> • <u>Brit</u> (colloquial)
Government	Unitary ^[c] <u>parliamentary constitutional monarchy</u>
<div><div>• <u>Monarch</u></div><div>• <u>Prime Minister</u></div></div>	<u>Charles III</u> <u>Rishi Sunak</u>
Legislature	<u>Parliament</u>
<div><div>• <u>Upper house</u></div><div>• <u>Lower house</u></div></div>	<u>House of Lords</u> <u>House of Commons</u>
Formation	
<div><div>• <u>Laws in Wales Acts</u></div><div>• <u>Union of the Crowns</u></div><div>• <u>Treaty of Union</u></div><div>• <u>Acts of Union of England and</u></div></div>	1535 and 1542 24 March 1603 22 July 1706 1 May 1707

Settlement by Cro-Magnons of what was to become the United Kingdom occurred in waves beginning by about 30,000 years ago.^[50] The island has been continuously inhabited only since the last retreat of the ice around 11,500 years ago. By the end of the region's prehistoric period, the population is thought to have belonged largely to a culture termed Insular Celtic, comprising Brittonic Britain and Gaelic Ireland.^[51]

The Roman conquest, beginning in 43 AD, and the 400-year rule of southern Britain, was followed by an invasion by Germanic Anglo-Saxon settlers, reducing the Brittonic area mainly to what was to become Wales, Cornwall and, until the latter stages of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, the Hen Ogledd (northern England and parts of southern Scotland).^[52] Most of the region settled by the Anglo-Saxons became unified as the Kingdom of England in the 10th century.^[53] Meanwhile, Gaelic-speakers in north-west Britain (with connections to the north-east of Ireland and traditionally supposed to have migrated from there in the 5th century)^[54] united with the Picts to create the Kingdom of Scotland in the 9th century.^[55]

In 1066, the Normans invaded England from northern France. After conquering England, they seized large parts of Wales, conquered much of Ireland and were invited to settle in Scotland, bringing to each country feudalism on the Northern French model and Norman-French culture.^[56] The Anglo-Norman ruling class greatly influenced, but eventually assimilated with, the local cultures.^[57] Subsequent medieval English kings completed the conquest of Wales and tried unsuccessfully to annex Scotland. Asserting its independence in the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath, Scotland maintained its independence thereafter, albeit in near-constant conflict with England.

The English monarchs, through inheritance of substantial territories in France and claims to the French crown, were also heavily involved in conflicts in France, most notably the Hundred Years' War, while the Kings of Scots were in an alliance with the French during this period.^[58] Early modern Britain saw religious conflict resulting from the Reformation and the introduction of Protestant state churches in each country.^[59] The English Reformation ushered in political, constitutional, social and cultural change in the 16th century and established the Church of England. Moreover, it defined a national identity for England and slowly, but profoundly, changed people's religious beliefs.^[60] Wales was fully incorporated into the Kingdom of England,^[61] and Ireland was constituted as a kingdom in personal union with the English crown.^[62] In what was to become Northern Ireland, the lands of the independent Catholic Gaelic nobility were confiscated and given to Protestant settlers from England and Scotland.^[63]



Stonehenge in Wiltshire is a ring of stones, each about 4 m (13 ft) high, 2 m (7 ft) wide and 25 tonnes, erected 2400–2200 BC.



The Roman Baths in Bath, Somerset, are a well-preserved thermae from Roman Britain.



The Bayeux Tapestry depicts the Battle of Hastings, 1066, and the events leading to it.

In 1603, the kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland were united in a personal union when James VI, King of Scots, inherited the crowns of England and Ireland and moved his court from Edinburgh to London; each country nevertheless remained a separate political entity and retained its separate political, legal, and religious institutions.^[64]

In the mid-17th century, all three kingdoms were involved in a series of connected wars (including the English Civil War) which led to the temporary overthrow of the monarchy, with the execution of King Charles I, and the establishment of the short-lived unitary republic of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland.^[65]

Although the monarchy was restored, the Interregnum along with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the subsequent Bill of Rights 1689 in England and Claim of Right Act 1689 in Scotland ensured that, unlike much of the rest of Europe, royal absolutism would not prevail, and a professed Catholic could never accede to the throne. The British constitution would develop on the basis of constitutional monarchy and the parliamentary system.^[66] With the founding of the Royal Society in 1660, science was greatly encouraged. During this period, particularly in England, the development of naval power and the interest in voyages of discovery led to the acquisition and settlement of overseas colonies, particularly in North America and the Caribbean.^[67]

Though previous attempts at uniting the two kingdoms within Great Britain in 1606, 1667, and 1689 had proved unsuccessful, the attempt initiated in 1705 led to the Treaty of Union of 1706 being agreed and ratified by both parliaments.

Kingdom of Great Britain

On 1 May 1707, the Kingdom of Great Britain was formed, the result of the Acts of Union 1707.^[68] In the 18th century, cabinet government developed under Robert Walpole, in practice the first prime minister (1721–1742). A series of Jacobite uprisings sought to remove the Protestant House of Hanover from the throne and restore the Catholic House of Stuart. The Jacobites were finally defeated at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, after which the Scottish Highlanders were forcibly assimilated into Scotland by revoking the feudal independence of clan chiefs. The British colonies in North America that broke away in the American War of Independence became the United States, recognised by Britain in 1783. British imperial ambition turned towards Asia, particularly to India.^[69]



The Treaty of Union led to a united kingdom of all of Great Britain.

Britain played a leading part in the Atlantic slave trade, mainly between 1662 and 1807 when British or British-colonial slave ships transported nearly 3.3 million slaves from Africa.^[70] The slaves were taken to work on plantations, principally in the Caribbean but also North America.^[71] Slavery coupled with the Caribbean sugar industry had a significant role in strengthening the British economy in the 18th century.^[72] However, with pressure from the abolitionism movement, Parliament banned the trade in 1807, banned slavery in the British Empire in 1833, and Britain took a role in the movement to abolish slavery worldwide through the blockade of Africa and pressing other nations to end their trade with a series of treaties.^[73]

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland

In 1800 the parliaments of Great Britain and Ireland each passed an Act of Union, uniting the two kingdoms and creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland on 1 January 1801.^[74]

After the defeat of France at the end of the French Revolutionary Wars and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815), the United Kingdom emerged as the principal naval and imperial power (with London the largest city in the world from about 1830).^[75] Unchallenged at sea, British dominance was later described as Pax Britannica ("British Peace"), a period of relative peace among the great powers (1815–1914) during which the British Empire became the global hegemon and adopted the role of global policeman.^[76] By the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851, Britain was described as the "workshop of the world".^[77] From 1853 to 1856, Britain took part in the Crimean War, allied with the Ottoman Empire against Tsarist Russia,^[78] participating in the naval battles of the Baltic Sea known as the Åland War in the Gulf of Bothnia and the Gulf of Finland, among others.^[79] Following the Indian Rebellion in 1857, the British government led by Lord Palmerston assumed direct rule over India. Alongside the formal control it exerted over its own colonies, British dominance of much of world trade meant that it effectively controlled the economies of regions such as East Asia and Latin America.^[80]



The opening engagement at the Battle of Trafalgar, by J.W. Carmichael

Throughout the Victorian era, political attitudes favoured free trade and laissez-faire policies, as well as a gradual widening of the voting franchise, with the 1884 Reform Act championed by William Gladstone granting suffrage to a majority of males for the first time. The British population increased at a dramatic rate, accompanied by rapid urbanisation, causing significant social and economic stresses.^[81] By the late 19th century, the Conservatives under Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Salisbury initiated a period of imperial expansion in Africa, maintained a policy of splendid isolation in Europe, and attempted to contain Russian influence in Afghanistan and Persia, in what came to be known as the Great Game.^[82] During this time, Canada, Australia and New Zealand were granted self-governing dominion status.^[83] At the turn of the century, Britain's industrial dominance became challenged by the German Empire and the United States.^[84] The Edwardian era saw social reform and home rule for Ireland become important domestic issues, while the Labour Party emerged from an alliance of trade unions and small socialist groups in 1900, and suffragettes campaigned for women's right to vote.^[85]



Victoria reigned as Queen of the United Kingdom and Empress of India during the 19th century.

World wars and partition of Ireland

Britain was one of the principal Allies that defeated the Central Powers in the First World War (1914–1918). Alongside their French, Russian and (after 1917) American counterparts,^[86] British armed forces were engaged across much of the British Empire and in several regions of Europe, particularly on the Western Front.^[87] The high fatalities of trench warfare caused the loss of much of a generation of men, with lasting social effects in the nation and a great disruption in the social order. Britain had suffered 2.5 million casualties and finished the war with a huge national debt.^[87] The consequences of the war persuaded the government to expand the right to vote in national and local elections with the Representation

of the People Act 1918.^[87] After the war, Britain became a permanent member of the Executive Council of the League of Nations and received a mandate over a number of former German and Ottoman colonies. Under the leadership of David Lloyd George, the British Empire reached its greatest extent, covering a fifth of the world's land surface and a quarter of its population.^[88]



Wreaths being laid during the Remembrance Sunday service at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London

By the mid-1920s, most of the British population could listen to BBC radio programmes.^{[89][90]} Experimental television broadcasts began in 1929 and the first scheduled BBC Television Service commenced in 1936.^[91] The rise of Irish nationalism, and disputes within Ireland over the terms of Irish Home Rule, led eventually to the partition of the island in 1921.^[92] The Irish Free State became independent, initially with Dominion status in 1922, and unambiguously independent in 1931. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom.^[93] The 1928 Equal Franchise Act gave women electoral equality with men in national elections. Strikes in the mid-1920s culminated in the General Strike of 1926, which ended in a victory for the government led by Stanley Baldwin. Britain had still not recovered from the effects of the First World War when the Great Depression (1929–1932) led to considerable unemployment and hardship in the old industrial areas, as well as political and social unrest with rising membership in communist and socialist parties. A coalition government was formed in 1931.^[94]

Nonetheless, "Britain was a very wealthy country, formidable in arms, ruthless in pursuit of its interests and sitting at the heart of a global production system."^[95] After Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Britain entered the Second World War. Winston Churchill became prime minister and head of a coalition government in 1940. Despite the defeat of its European allies in the first year, Britain and its Empire continued the war against Germany. Churchill engaged industry, scientists and engineers to support the government and the military in the prosecution of the war effort.^[95]



Spitfire and Hurricane as flown in the Battle of Britain during the Second World War

In 1940, the Royal Air Force defeated the German Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain. Urban areas suffered heavy bombing during the Blitz. The Grand Alliance of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union formed in 1941, leading the Allies against the Axis powers. There were eventual hard-fought victories in the Battle of the Atlantic, the North Africa campaign and the Italian campaign. British forces played important roles in the Normandy landings of 1944 and the liberation of Europe. The British Army led the Burma campaign against Japan, and the British Pacific Fleet fought Japan at sea. British scientists contributed to the Manhattan Project whose task was to build an atomic weapon.^[96] Once built, it was decided, with British consent, to use the weapon against Japan.^[97] The wartime net losses in British national wealth amounted to 18.6% (£4.595 billion) of the prewar wealth (£24.68 billion), at 1938 prices.^[98]

Postwar 20th century

The UK was one of the Big Three powers (along with the US and the Soviet Union) who met to plan the post-war world;^[99] it was an original signatory to the Declaration by United Nations and became one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. It worked closely with the United States



The British Empire at its territorial peak in 1921

to establish the IMF, World Bank and NATO.^[100] The war left the UK severely weakened and financially dependent on the Marshall Plan,^[101] but it was spared the total war that devastated eastern Europe.^[102]

In the immediate post-war years, the Labour government under Clement Attlee initiated a radical programme of reforms, which significantly impacted British society in the following

decades.^[103] Major industries and public utilities were nationalised, a welfare state was established, and a comprehensive, publicly funded healthcare system, the National Health Service, was created.^[104] The rise of nationalism in the colonies coincided with Britain's much-diminished economic position, so that a policy of decolonisation was unavoidable. Independence was granted to India and Pakistan in 1947.^[105] Over the next three decades, most colonies of the British Empire gained their independence, and many became members of the Commonwealth of Nations.^[106]

The UK was the third country to develop a nuclear weapons arsenal (with its first atomic bomb test, Operation Hurricane, in 1952), but the post-war limits of Britain's international role were illustrated by the Suez Crisis of 1956. The international spread of the English language ensured the continuing international influence of its literature and culture.^{[108][109]} As a result of a shortage of workers in the 1950s, the government encouraged immigration from Commonwealth countries. In the following decades, the UK became a more multi-ethnic society.^[110] Despite rising living standards in the late 1950s and 1960s, the UK's economic performance was less successful than many of its main competitors such as France, West Germany and Japan.



Concorde was a supersonic airliner that reduced transatlantic flight time from 8 hours to 3.5 hours.^[107]

In the decades-long process of European integration, the UK was a founding member of the Western European Union, established with the London and Paris Conferences in 1954. In 1960 the UK was one of the seven founding members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), but in 1973 it left to join the European Communities (EC). In a 1975 referendum 67% voted to stay in it.^[111] When the EC became the European Union (EU) in 1992, the UK was one of the 12 founding member states.

From the late 1960s, Northern Ireland suffered communal and paramilitary violence (sometimes affecting other parts of the UK) conventionally known as the Troubles. It is usually considered to have ended with the 1998 Belfast "Good Friday" Agreement.^[112]

Following a period of widespread economic slowdown and industrial strife in the 1970s, the Conservative government of the 1980s led by Margaret Thatcher initiated a radical policy of monetarism, deregulation, particularly of the financial sector (for example, the Big Bang in 1986) and labour markets, the sale of state-owned companies (privatisation), and the withdrawal of subsidies to others.^[113]

In 1982, Argentina invaded the British territories of South Georgia and the Falkland Islands, leading to the 10-week Falklands War in which Argentine forces were defeated. The inhabitants of the islands are predominantly descendants of British settlers, and strongly favour British sovereignty, expressed in a 2013

referendum. From 1984, the UK economy was helped by the inflow of substantial North Sea oil revenues.^[114]

Another British overseas territory is Gibraltar, it was ceded to Great Britain in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, the treaty covers the town, the port and fortifications.^[115] It has been a key military base for the UK and a referendum in 2002 for shared sovereignty with Spain was lost by 98.97%.

Around the end of the 20th century, there were major changes to the governance of the UK with the establishment of devolved administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.^[116] The statutory incorporation followed acceptance of the European Convention on Human Rights. The UK remained a great power with global diplomatic and military influence and a leading role in the United Nations and NATO.^[117]



Canary Wharf, a symbol of the financial reforms initiated by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s

21st century



Pro-Brexit campaigners outside Parliament in London in November 2016, after the Brexit referendum

The UK broadly supported the United States' approach to the "war on terror" in the early 21st century.^[118] British troops fought in the War in Afghanistan, but controversy surrounded Britain's military deployment in Iraq, which saw the largest protest in British history demonstrating in opposition to the government led by Tony Blair.^[119]

The 2008 global financial crisis severely affected the UK economy.^[120] The Cameron–Clegg coalition government of 2010 introduced austerity measures intended to tackle the substantial public deficits.^[121] Studies have suggested that policy led to significant social disruption and suffering.^{[122][123]} A referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 resulted in the Scottish electorate

voting by 55.3 to 44.7% to remain part of the United Kingdom.^[124]

In 2016, 51.9 per cent of voters in the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union.^[125] The UK left the EU in 2020.^[126] On 1 May 2021 the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement came into force.^[127]

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the UK's economy, caused major disruptions to education and had far-reaching impacts on society and politics in 2020 and 2021.^{[128][129][130]} The United Kingdom was the first country in the world to use an approved COVID-19 vaccine, developing its own vaccine through a collaboration between Oxford University and AstraZeneca, which allowed the UK's vaccine rollout to be among the fastest in the world.^{[131][132]}

On 8 September 2022, Elizabeth II, the longest-living and longest-reigning British monarch, died at the age of 96.^[133] Upon the Queen's death, her eldest child Charles, Prince of Wales, acceded to the British throne as Charles III.^[134]

Geography

The total area of the United Kingdom is approximately 94,354 square miles (244,376 km²),^{[d][7]} with a land area of 93,723 square miles (242,741 km²).^[7] The country occupies the major part of the British Isles^[135] archipelago and includes the island of Great Britain, the north-eastern one-sixth of the island of Ireland and some smaller surrounding islands. It lies between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea with the southeast coast coming within 22 miles (35 km) of the coast of northern France, from which it is separated by the English Channel.^[136]

The Royal Greenwich Observatory in London was chosen as the defining point of the Prime Meridian^[137] at the International Meridian Conference in 1884.^[138]

The United Kingdom lies between latitudes 49° and 61° N, and longitudes 9° W and 2° E. Northern Ireland shares a 224-mile (360 km) land boundary with the Republic of Ireland.^[136] The coastline of Great Britain is 11,073 miles (17,820 km) long.^[139] It is connected to continental Europe by the Channel Tunnel, which at 31 miles (50 km) (24 miles (38 km) underwater) is the longest underwater tunnel in the world.^[140]

The UK contains four terrestrial ecoregions: Celtic broadleaf forests, English Lowlands beech forests, North Atlantic moist mixed forests, and Caledon conifer forests.^[141] The area of woodland in the UK in 2023 is estimated to be 3.25 million hectares, which represents 13% of the total land area in the UK.^[142]

Climate

Most of the United Kingdom has a temperate climate, with generally cool temperatures and plentiful rainfall all year round.^[136] The temperature varies with the seasons seldom dropping below 0 °C (32 °F) or rising above 30 °C (86 °F).^[143] Some parts, away from the coast, of upland England, Wales, Northern Ireland and most of Scotland, experience a subpolar oceanic climate (*Cfc*). Higher elevations in Scotland experience a continental subarctic climate (*Dfc*) and the mountains experience a tundra climate (*ET*).^[144]

The prevailing wind is from the southwest and bears frequent spells of mild and wet weather from the Atlantic Ocean,^[136] although the eastern parts are mostly sheltered from this wind. Since the majority of the rain falls over the western regions, the eastern parts are the driest. Atlantic currents, warmed by the Gulf Stream, bring mild winters, especially in the west where winters are wet and even more so over high ground. Summers are warmest in the southeast of England and coolest in the north. Heavy snowfall can occur in winter and early spring on high ground, and occasionally settles to great depth away from the hills.^[145]



Satellite image of the United Kingdom (excluding Shetland)

The average total annual sunshine in the United Kingdom is 1339.7 hours, which is just under 30% of the maximum possible.^[146] The hours of sunshine vary from 1200 to about 1580 hours per year, and since 1996 the UK has been and still is receiving above the 1981 to 2010 average hours of sunshine.^[147]

As of 2022, the United Kingdom is ranked 2nd out of 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index.^[148] A law has been passed that UK greenhouse gas emissions will be net zero by 2050.^[149]

Topography

England accounts for 53 per cent of the UK, covering 50,350 square miles (130,395 km²).^[150] Most of the country consists of lowland terrain,^[151] with upland and mountainous terrain northwest of the Tees–Exe line which roughly divides the UK into lowland and upland areas. Lowland areas include Cornwall, the New Forest, the South Downs and the Norfolk Broads. Upland areas include the Lake District, the Pennines, the Yorkshire Dales, Exmoor, and Dartmoor. The main rivers and estuaries are the Thames, Severn, and the Humber. England's highest mountain is Scafell Pike, at 978 metres (3,209 ft) in the Lake District; its largest island is the Isle of Wight.

Scotland accounts for 32 per cent of the UK, covering 30,410 square miles (78,772 km²).^[152] This includes nearly 800 islands,^[153] notably the Hebrides, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands. Scotland is the most mountainous constituent country of the UK, the Highlands to the north and west are the more rugged region containing the majority of Scotland's mountainous land, including the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and Ben Nevis which at 1,345 metres (4,413 ft)^[154] is the highest point in the British Isles.^[155]

Wales accounts for less than 9 per cent of the UK, covering 8,020 square miles (20,779 km²).^[156] Wales is mostly mountainous, though South Wales is less mountainous than North and mid Wales. The highest mountains in Wales are in Snowdonia and include Snowdon (Welsh: *Yr Wyddfa*) which, at 1,085 metres (3,560 ft), is the highest peak in Wales.^[151] Wales has over 1,680 miles (2,704 kilometres) of coastline including the Pembrokeshire Coast.^[139] Several islands lie off the Welsh mainland, the largest of which is Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*).



Köppen climate types of the UK



The Skiddaw massif, Keswick and Derwent Water in the Lake District



Skye is one of the major islands in the Inner Hebrides and part of the Scottish Highlands.

Northern Ireland, separated from Great Britain by the Irish Sea and North Channel, has an area of 5,470 square miles (14,160 km²) and is mostly hilly. It includes Lough Neagh which, at 150 square miles (388 km²), is the largest lake in the British Isles by area,^[157] Lough Erne which has over 150 islands and the Giant's Causeway which is a World Heritage Site. The highest peak in Northern Ireland is Slieve Donard in the Mourne Mountains at 852 metres (2,795 ft).^[151]

Politics

The UK is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy operating under the Westminster system, otherwise known as a "democratic parliamentary monarchy".^[158] It is a centralised, unitary state^{[159][160]} wherein the Parliament of the United Kingdom is sovereign.^[161] Parliament is made up of the elected House of Commons, the appointed House of Lords and the Crown (as personified by the monarch).^{[o][164]} The main business of parliament takes place in the two houses,^[164] but royal assent is required for a bill to become an act of parliament (that is, statute law).^[165] As a result of parliamentary sovereignty, the British constitution is uncodified, consisting mostly of disparate written sources, including parliamentary statutes, judge-made case law and international treaties, together with constitutional conventions.^[166] Nevertheless, the Supreme Court recognises a number of principles underlying the British constitution, such as parliamentary sovereignty, the rule of law, democracy, and upholding international law.^[167]



Charles III, Monarch
since 2022

Rishi Sunak, Prime Minister
since 2022

King Charles III is the current monarch and head of state of the UK and of 14 other independent countries. These 15 countries are today referred to as "Commonwealth realms". The monarch is formally vested with all executive authority as the personal embodiment of the Crown and is "...fundamental to the law and working of government in the UK."^[168] The disposition of such powers however, including those belonging to the royal prerogative, is generally exercised only on the advice of ministers of the Crown responsible to Parliament and thence to the electorate. Nevertheless, in the performance of official duties, the monarch has "the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn".^[169] In addition, the monarch has a number of reserve powers at his disposal, albeit rarely used, to uphold responsible government and prevent constitutional crises.^[p]

For general elections (elections to the House of Commons), the UK is currently divided into 650 constituencies, each of which is represented by one member of Parliament (MP) elected by the first-past-the-post system.^[171] MPs hold office for up to five years and must then stand for re-election if they wish to continue to be an MP.^[171] The Conservative Party, colloquially known as the Tory Party or the Tories, and the Labour Party have been the dominant political parties in the UK since the 1920s, leading to



The Palace of Westminster in London is the seat of both houses of the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

the UK being described as a two-party system. However, since the 1920s other political parties have won seats in the House of Commons, although never more than the Conservatives or Labour.^[172]

The prime minister is the head of government in the UK.^[173] Acting under the direction and supervision of a Cabinet of senior ministers selected and led by the prime minister, the Government serves as the principal instrument for public policymaking, administers public services and, through the Privy Council, promulgates statutory instruments and tenders advice to the monarch.^{[174][175][176]} Nearly all prime ministers have served concurrently as First Lord of the Treasury^[177] and all prime ministers have continuously served as First Lord of the Treasury since 1905,^[178] Minister for the Civil Service since 1968,^[179] and Minister for the Union since 2019.^[180] While appointed by the monarch, in modern times the prime minister is, by convention, an MP, the leader of the political party with the most seats in the House of Commons, and holds office by virtue of their ability to command the confidence of the House of Commons.^{[181][182][183]} The current Prime Minister, as of October 2022, is Rishi Sunak MP, leader of the Conservative Party.

Although not part of the United Kingdom, the three Crown Dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man and 14 British Overseas Territories across the globe are subject to the sovereignty of the British Crown. The Crown exercises its responsibilities in relation to the Crown Dependencies mainly through the British government's Home Office and for the British Overseas Territories principally through the Foreign Office.^[184]

Administrative divisions

The geographical division of the United Kingdom into counties or shires began in England and Scotland in the early Middle Ages, and was completed throughout Great Britain and Ireland by the early Modern Period.^[185] Modern local government by elected councils, partly based on the ancient counties, was established by separate Acts of Parliament: in England and Wales in 1888, Scotland in 1889 and Ireland in 1898, meaning there is no consistent system of administrative or geographic demarcation across the UK.^[186] Until the 19th century there was little change to those arrangements, but there has since been a constant evolution of role and function.^[187]

Local government in England is complex, with the distribution of functions varying according to local arrangements. The upper-tier subdivisions of England are the nine regions, now used primarily for statistical purposes.^[188] One of the regions, Greater London, has had a directly elected assembly and mayor since 2000 following popular support for the proposal in a 1998 referendum.^[189]

Local government in Scotland is divided into 32 council areas with a wide variation in size and population. The cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee are separate council areas, as is the Highland Council, which includes a third of Scotland's area but only just over 200,000 people. Local councils are made up of elected councillors, of whom there are 1,223.^[190]

Local government in Wales consists of 22 unitary authorities, each led by a leader and cabinet elected by the council itself. These include the cities of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, which are unitary authorities in their own right.^[191] Elections are held every four years under the first-past-the-post system.^[191]

Local government in Northern Ireland since 1973, has been organised into 26 district councils, each elected by single transferable vote. Their powers are limited to services such as waste collection, dog control, and maintaining parks and cemeteries.^[192] In 2008 the executive agreed on proposals to create 11 new councils

and replace the present system.^[193]

Devolved governments

Beginning in 1998, a process of devolution has transferred legislative and executive powers previously held by United Kingdom institutions to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.^[194] As a result, a Scottish Government and Parliament, Welsh Government and Senedd (Parliament) and Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly have been created.^[195] A similar process has not taken place for England.^[194]

The UK does not have a codified constitution and constitutional matters are not among the powers that have been devolved. Under the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, the UK Parliament could, in theory, therefore, abolish the Scottish Parliament, Senedd or Northern Ireland Assembly.^[196] In practice, it would be politically difficult for the UK Parliament to abolish devolution to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd, because these institutions were created by referendum decisions.^[197] The political constraints placed upon the UK Parliament's power to interfere with devolution in Northern Ireland are greater still, because devolution in Northern Ireland rests upon an international agreement with the Government of Ireland.^[198] The UK Parliament restricts the three devolved parliaments' legislative powers in economic policy matters through an act passed in 2020.^[199]



The four countries of the United Kingdom

Scotland

Since 1999, Scotland has had a devolved national government and parliament with wide-ranging powers over any matter that has not been specifically reserved to the UK Parliament.^{[200][201]} Their power over economic issues is significantly constrained by an act of the UK parliament passed in 2020.^[199]

The current Scottish Government is a Scottish National Party minority government,^[209] led by First Minister Humza Yousaf, leader of the Scottish National Party. In 2014, the Scottish independence referendum was held, with 55.3% voting against independence from the United Kingdom and 44.7% voting in favour, resulting in Scotland staying within the United Kingdom. Local government in Scotland is divided into 32 council areas with a wide variation in size and population. Local councils are made up of elected councillors, of whom there are 1,223.^[190]

The Scottish Parliament is separate from the Scottish Government, and is made up of 129 elected Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and is the law making body of Scotland. It does, however, scrutinise the work of the incumbent Scottish Government and considers any piece of proposed legislation through parliamentary debates, committees and parliamentary questions.^[210]

Wales

Since 1999, Wales has a devolved national government and legislature, known as the Senedd. Elections to the Senedd use the additional member system. They have more limited powers than those devolved to Scotland.^[211] The Senedd is able to legislate on any matter not specifically reserved to the UK Parliament

through Acts of Senedd Cymru. The current Welsh Government is Labour, led by First Minister Vaughan Gething, who has been the First Minister since 2024. Local government in Wales consists of 22 unitary authorities, each led by a leader and cabinet elected by the council itself.

Northern Ireland

The devolved form of government in Northern Ireland is based on the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which brought to an end a 30-year period of unionist-nationalist communal conflict known as The Troubles. The Agreement was confirmed by referendum and implemented later that year. It established power sharing arrangements for a devolved government and legislature, referred to as the Executive and Assembly respectively.^[212] Elections to the Assembly use the single transferable vote system. The Executive and Assembly have powers similar to those devolved to Scotland. The Executive is led by a diarchy representing unionist and nationalist members of the Assembly.^[213] The First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland are the joint heads of government of Northern Ireland.^{[214][215]} Local government in Northern Ireland since 2015 has been divided between 11 councils with limited responsibilities.^[192]

Foreign relations

The UK is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a member of NATO, AUKUS, the Commonwealth of Nations, the G7 finance ministers, the G7 forum, the G20, the OECD, the WTO, the Council of Europe and the OSCE.^[216] The UK has the British Council which is a British organisation based in over 100 countries specialising in international cultural and educational opportunities. The UK is said to have a "Special Relationship" with the United States and a close partnership with France – the "Entente cordiale" – and shares nuclear weapons technology with both countries;^{[217][218]} the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance is considered to be the oldest binding military alliance in the world. The UK is also closely linked with the Republic of Ireland; the two countries share a Common Travel Area and co-operate through the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council. Britain's global presence and influence is further amplified through its trading relations, foreign investments, official development assistance and military engagements.^[219] Canada, Australia and New Zealand, all of which are former colonies of the British Empire which share King Charles as their head of state, are the most favourably viewed countries in the world by British people.^[220]



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak greets US President Joe Biden at the 2022 G-20 Bali Summit.

Law and criminal justice

The United Kingdom does not have a single legal system as Article 19 of the 1706 Treaty of Union provided for the continuation of Scotland's separate legal system.^[221] Today the UK has three distinct systems of law: English law, Northern Ireland law and Scots law. A new Supreme Court of the United Kingdom came into being in October 2009 to replace the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords.^[222] The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, including the same members as the Supreme Court, is the highest court of appeal for several independent Commonwealth countries, the British Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies.^[223]

Both English law, which applies in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland law are based on common-law principles.^[224] The courts of England and Wales are headed by the Senior Courts of England and Wales, consisting of the Court of Appeal, the High Court of Justice (for civil cases) and the Crown Court (for criminal cases).^[225] Scots law is a hybrid system based on common-law and civil-law principles. The chief courts are the Court of Session, for civil cases,^[226] and the High Court of Justiciary, for criminal cases.^[227] The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom serves as the highest court of appeal for civil cases under Scots law.^[228]



The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and civil cases in Scotland.

Crime in England and Wales increased in the period between 1981 and 1995, though since that peak there has been an overall fall of 66 per cent in recorded crime from 1995 to 2015,^[229] according to crime statistics. As of June 2023, the United Kingdom has the highest per-capita incarceration rate in Western Europe.^{[230][231][232]}

UK labour laws entitle staff to have a minimum set of employment rights including a minimum wage, a minimum of 28 days annual holiday, statutory sick pay and a pension. Same-sex marriage has been legal in England, Scotland, and Wales since 2014, and in Northern Ireland since 2020.^[233] LGBT equality in the United Kingdom is considered advanced by modern standards.^{[234][235]}

Military

His Majesty's Armed Forces consist of three professional service branches: the Royal Navy and Royal Marines (forming the Naval Service), the British Army and the Royal Air Force.^[236] The armed forces of the United Kingdom are managed by the Ministry of Defence and controlled by the Defence Council, chaired by the Secretary of State for Defence. The Commander-in-Chief is the British monarch, to whom members of the forces swear an oath of allegiance.^[237] The Armed Forces are charged with protecting the UK and its overseas territories, promoting the UK's global security interests and supporting international peacekeeping efforts. They are active and regular participants in NATO, including the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, the Five Power Defence Arrangements, RIMPAC and other worldwide coalition operations. Overseas garrisons and facilities are maintained in Ascension Island, Bahrain, Belize, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Diego Garcia, the Falkland Islands, Germany, Gibraltar, Kenya, Oman, Qatar and Singapore.^[238]



HMS Queen Elizabeth
and HMS Prince of
Wales



Royal Navy Destroyer
HMS Defender



Royal Air Force
Eurofighter Typhoon Jet



British Army Challenger
3 Main Battle Tank

According to sources which include the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the UK has either the fourth- or the fifth-highest military expenditure. Total defence spending in 2024 is estimated at 2.3% of GDP.^[239] Following the end of the

Cold War, defence policy has a stated assumption that "the most demanding operations" will be undertaken as part of a coalition.^[240]

Economy

The UK has a partially regulated market economy.^[243] Based on market exchange rates, the UK is the sixth-largest economy in the world and the second-largest in Europe by nominal GDP.

The United Kingdom uses the pound sterling, the fourth most-traded currency in the foreign exchange market and the world's fourth-largest reserve currency (after the United States dollar, euro, and yen).^[244] Sterling was the 2nd best-performing G10 currency against the dollar in 2023 with a gain of about 5%, with only the Swiss franc performing better.^{[245][246]} London is the world capital for foreign exchange trading, with a global market share of 38.1% in 2022^[247] of the daily \$7.5 trillion global turnover.^[248] HM Treasury, led by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is responsible for developing and executing the government's public finance policy and economic policy. The Bank of England is the UK's central bank and is responsible for issuing notes and coins in the pound sterling. Banks in Scotland and Northern Ireland retain the right to issue their own notes, subject to retaining enough Bank of England notes in reserve to cover their issue. In 2022, the UK became the world's fourth-largest exporter behind only China, the US, and Germany.^[249] The estimated nominal GDP of the UK for 2024 is £2.765 trillion.^[250] This value is 23% higher than the 2019 figure of £2.255 trillion^[251] before leaving the EU (at similar US and EU exchange rates to 2019).^{[252][q]}

The service sector made up around 80% of the UK's GVA in 2021.^[254] As of 2022, the UK is the world's second-largest exporter of services.^[255] London is one of the world's largest financial centres, ranking second in the world in the Global Financial Centres Index in 2022. London also has the largest city GDP in Europe.^[256] Edinburgh ranks 17th in the world, and sixth in Western Europe in the Global Financial Centres Index in 2020.^[257] Tourism is very important to the British economy; London was named as Europe's most popular destination for 2022.^{[258][259]} The creative industries accounted for 5.9% of the UK's GVA in 2019, having grown by 43.6% in real terms from 2010.^[260] Creative industries contributed more than £111bn to the UK economy in 2018, growth in the sector is more than five times larger than growth across the UK economy as a whole as reported in 2018.^[261] Lloyd's of London is the world's largest insurance and reinsurance market and is located in London.^[262] WPP plc, the world's biggest advertising company, is also based in the UK. The UK is one of the leading retail markets in Europe and is home to Europe's largest e-commerce market.^[263] John Lewis is the UK's largest employee owned business.^[264]

The automotive industry employs around 800,000 people, with a turnover in 2022 of £67 billion, generating £27 billion of exports (10% of the UK's total export of goods).^[265] In 2023, the UK produced around 905,100 passenger vehicles and 120,400 commercial vehicles, output was up 17.0% on the previous



London is the largest urban economy in Europe^[241] and, alongside New York, the city in the world most integrated with the global economy.^[242]



The Bank of England is the central bank of the United Kingdom and the model on which most modern central banks have been based.

year.^[266] Britain is known for iconic cars such as Mini and Jaguar,^[267] also other luxury cars such as Rolls-Royce, Bentley and Range Rover. The UK is a major centre for engine manufacturing: in 2022 around 1.5 million engines were produced.^[265] It is also the world's fourth-largest exporter of engines, as of 2021.^[268] The UK motorsport industry employs more than 40,000 people, comprises around 4,300 companies and has an annual turnover of around £10 billion.^[269] 7 of the 10 Formula One teams are based in the UK, with their technology being used in supercars and hypercars from McLaren, Aston Martin and Lotus.



Aston Martin manufacture vehicles in Gaydon, England.

The aerospace industry of the UK is the second-largest national aerospace industry in the world depending upon the method of measurement and has an annual turnover of around £30 billion.^[270] The UK space industry was worth £17.5bn in 2020/21 and employed 48,800 people. Since 2012, the number of space organisations has grown on average nearly 21% per year, with 1,293 organisations reported in 2021.^{[271][272]} The UK Space Agency has stated in 2023 that it is investing £1.6 billion in space related projects.^[273]

The agriculture industry is intensive, highly mechanised and efficient by European standards, producing about 60 per cent of food needs with less than 1.6 per cent of the labour force (535,000 workers).^[274] Around two-thirds of production is devoted to livestock, one-third to arable crops. The UK retains a significant, though much reduced fishing industry. It is also rich in a variety of natural resources including coal, petroleum, natural gas, tin, limestone, iron ore, salt, clay, chalk, gypsum, lead, silica and an abundance of arable land.^[275]

The United Kingdom has among the highest levels of income inequality in Europe^[276] and the OECD,^[277] and is one of the most regionally unequal high-income countries in the world.^{[278][279]}

Science and technology

England and Scotland were leading centres of the Scientific Revolution from the 17th century.^[281] The United Kingdom led the Industrial Revolution from the 18th century, and has continued to produce scientists and engineers credited with important advances.^[282] Major theorists from the 17th and 18th centuries include Isaac Newton, whose laws of motion and illumination of gravity have been seen as a keystone of modern science;^[283] from the 19th century Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution by natural selection was fundamental to the development of modern biology, and James Clerk Maxwell, who formulated classical electromagnetic theory; and more recently Stephen Hawking, who advanced major theories in the fields of cosmology, quantum gravity and the investigation of black holes.^[284]



Cambridge is the most intensive research cluster for science and technology in the world.^[280]

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) is responsible for helping to encourage, develop and manage the UK's scientific, research, and technological outputs. Scientific research and development remains important in British universities, with many establishing science parks to facilitate

production and co-operation with industry.^[285] In 2022 the UK retained its number one spot for technology in Europe reaching a combined market value of \$1 trillion. Cambridge was named the number one university in the world for producing successful technology founders.^[286]

For four consecutive years, from 2020 to 2023, the UK maintained its fourth-place ranking in the Global Innovation Index, a position determined by approximately 80 indicators encompassing the political environment, education, infrastructure, and knowledge creation, among others.^{[287][280]} During 2022, the UK produced 6.3 per cent of the world's scientific research papers and had a 10.5 per cent share of scientific citations, the third highest in the world (for both). The UK ranked 1st in the world for Field-Weighted Citation Impact.^[288] Scientific journals produced in the UK include publications by the Royal Society, Nature, the British Medical Journal and The Lancet.^[289]

Transport

A radial road network totals 29,145 miles (46,904 km) of main roads, 2,173 miles (3,497 km) of motorways and 213,750 miles (344,000 km) of paved roads.^[136] The M25, encircling London, is the largest and busiest bypass in the world.^[290] In 2022, there were a total of 40.8 million licensed vehicles in Great Britain.^[291]

The UK has an extensive railway network of 10,072 miles (16,209 km). In Great Britain, the British Rail network was privatised between 1994 and 1997, followed by a rapid rise in passenger numbers. The UK was ranked eighth among national European rail systems in the 2017 European Railway Performance Index assessing intensity of use, quality of service and safety.^[292] High Speed 2 (HS2) is a new high speed railway under construction linking up London, the Midlands, the North and Scotland, serving over 25 stations, including eight of Britain's 10 largest cities and connecting around 30 million people, capable of speeds of up to 225 mph.^{[293][294]} Crossrail, which was renamed the Elizabeth line in 2016, in honour of Queen Elizabeth II, opened in 2022. It was Europe's largest construction project at the time and is estimated to bring in £42 billion to the UK economy.^{[295][296]}

Great British Railways is a planned state-owned public body that will oversee rail transport in Great Britain. In 2014, there were 5.2 billion bus journeys in the UK, 2.4 billion of which were in London.^[297] The red double-decker bus has entered popular culture as an internationally recognised icon of England.^[298] The London bus network is extensive, with over 6,800 scheduled services every weekday carrying about six million passengers on over 700 different routes making it one of the most extensive bus systems in the world and the largest in Europe.^[299]

In the year from October 2009 to September 2010, UK airports handled a total of 211.4 million passengers.^[300] In that period the three largest airports were London Heathrow Airport (65.6 million passengers), Gatwick Airport (31.5 million passengers) and London Stansted Airport (18.9 million passengers).^[300] London Heathrow Airport, located 15 miles (24 km) west



A high-speed East Coast Main Line train in Northumberland



London has the busiest city airport system in the world.

of the capital, is the world's second busiest airport by international passenger traffic and has the most international passenger traffic of any airport in the world,^[301] it is the hub for the UK flag carrier British Airways, as well as Virgin Atlantic.^[302]

Energy

In 2021, the UK was the world's 14th-largest consumer of energy and the 22nd-largest producer.^[303] The UK is home to many large energy companies, including two of the six major oil and gas companies – BP and Shell.^[304]

The total of all renewable electricity sources provided 43% of the electricity generated in the UK in 2020.^[305] The UK is one of the best sites in Europe for wind energy, and wind power production is the country's fastest-growing supply; in 2022, 26.8% of the UK's total electricity was generated by wind power.^[306] The UK has the largest offshore wind farm in the world, which is located off the coast of Yorkshire.^[307]



Wind turbines overlooking Ardrossan in Scotland. The UK is one of the best sites in Europe for wind energy, and wind power production is its fastest-growing supply.

In 2023, the UK had 9 nuclear reactors normally generating about 15 per cent of the UK's electricity.^[308] Unlike Germany and Japan, there are two reactors under construction and more planned.^{[309][310]} In the late 1990s, nuclear power plants contributed around 25 per cent of the total annual electricity generation in the UK, but this has gradually declined as old plants have been shut down. The UK government is investing in Small Modular Reactors and Advanced Modular Reactors research and development.

In 2021, the UK produced 935 thousand barrels per day (bbl/d) of oil (and other liquids) and consumed 1,258 thousand bbl/d.^[303] Production is now in decline and the UK has been a net importer of oil since 2005.^[311] In 2020, the UK had around 2 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves.^[311]

In 2021, the UK was the 21st-largest producer of natural gas in the world.^[312] Production is now in decline and the UK has been a net importer of natural gas since 2004.^[312] In 2020, the UK produced 1.8 million tonnes of coal falling 91% in 10 years.^[308] In 2020 it had proven recoverable coal reserves of 26 million tonnes.^[308] The UK Coal Authority has stated that there is a potential to produce between 7 billion tonnes and 16 billion tonnes of coal through underground coal gasification (UCG) or 'fracking',^[313] and based on current UK coal consumption, such reserves could last between 200 and 400 years.^[314]

Water supply and sanitation

Access to improved water supply and sanitation in the UK is universal. It is estimated that 96 per cent of households are connected to the sewer network.^[315] According to the Environment Agency, total water abstraction for public water supply in the UK was 16,406 megalitres per day in 2007.^[316]

In England and Wales water and sewerage services are provided by 10 private regional water and sewerage companies and 13 mostly smaller private "water only" companies. In Scotland, water and sewerage services are provided by a single public company, Scottish Water. In Northern Ireland water and sewerage services are also provided by a single public entity, Northern Ireland Water.^[317]

Demographics

In the 2011 census the total population of the United Kingdom was 63,181,775.^[318] It is the fourth-largest in Europe (after Russia, Germany and France), the fifth-largest in the Commonwealth and the 22nd-largest in the world. In mid-2014 and mid-2015 net long-term international migration contributed more to population growth. In mid-2012 and mid-2013 natural change contributed the most to population growth.^[319] Between 2001 and 2011 the population increased by an average annual rate of approximately 0.7 per cent.^[318] The 2011 census also showed that, over the previous 100 years, the proportion of the population aged 0–14 fell from 31 per cent to 18 per cent, and the proportion of people aged 65 and over rose from 5 to 16 per cent.^[318] In 2018 the median age of the UK population was 41.7 years.^[320]

England's population in 2011 was 53 million, representing some 84 per cent of the UK total.^[321] It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with 420 people per square kilometre in mid-2015,^[319] with a particular concentration in London and the south-east.^[322] The 2011 census put Scotland's population at 5.3 million,^[323] Wales at 3.06 million and Northern Ireland at 1.81 million.^[321]

In 2017 the average total fertility rate (TFR) across the UK was 1.74 children born per woman.^[324] While a rising birth rate is contributing to population growth, it remains considerably below the baby boom peak of 2.95 children per woman in 1964,^[325] or the high of 6.02 children born per woman in 1815,^[326] below the replacement rate of 2.1, but higher than the 2001 record low of 1.63.^[327] In 2011, 47.3 per cent of births in the UK were to unmarried women.^[328] The Office for National Statistics reported in 2015 that out of the UK population aged 16 and over, 1.7 per cent identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (2.0 per cent of males and 1.5 per cent of females); 4.5 per cent of respondents responded with "other", "I don't know", or did not respond.^[329] The number of transgender people in the UK was estimated to be between 65,000 and 300,000 by research between 2001 and 2008.^[330]

Largest urban areas of the United Kingdom							
(England and Wales: 2011 census built-up area; ^[331] Scotland: 2016 estimates settlement; ^[332] Northern Ireland: 2001 census urban area) ^[333]							
Rank	Urban area	Pop.	Principal settlement	Rank	Urban area	Pop.	Principal settlement
1	<u>Greater London</u>	9,787,426	<u>London</u>	11	<u>Bristol</u>	617,280	<u>Bristol</u>
2	<u>Greater Manchester</u>	2,553,379	<u>Manchester</u>	12	<u>Edinburgh</u>	512,150	<u>Edinburgh</u>
3	<u>West Midlands</u>	2,440,986	<u>Birmingham</u>	13	<u>Leicester</u>	508,916	<u>Leicester</u>
4	<u>West Yorkshire</u>	1,777,934	<u>Leeds</u>	14	<u>Belfast</u>	483,418	<u>Belfast</u>
5	<u>Greater Glasgow</u>	985,290	<u>Glasgow</u>	15	<u>Brighton & Hove</u>	474,485	<u>Brighton</u>
6	<u>Liverpool</u>	864,122	<u>Liverpool</u>	16	<u>South East Dorset</u>	466,266	<u>Bournemouth</u>
7	<u>South Hampshire</u>	855,569	<u>Southampton</u>	17	<u>Cardiff</u>	390,214	<u>Cardiff</u>
8	<u>Tyneside</u>	774,891	<u>Newcastle upon Tyne</u>	18	<u>Teesside</u>	376,633	<u>Middlesbrough</u>

9	Nottingham	729,977	<u>Nottingham</u>	19	Stoke-on-Trent	372,775	<u>Stoke-on-Trent</u>
10	Sheffield	685,368	<u>Sheffield</u>	20	Coventry	359,262	<u>Coventry</u>

Ethnicity

Historically, indigenous British people were thought to be descended from the various ethnic groups that settled there before the 12th century: the Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Norse and the Normans. Welsh people could be the oldest ethnic group in the UK.^[334] The UK has a history of non-white immigration with Liverpool having the oldest Black population in the country dating back to at least the 1730s during the period of the African slave trade. During this period it is estimated the Afro-Caribbean population of Great Britain was 10,000 to 15,000^[335] which later declined due to the abolition of slavery.^[336] The UK also has the oldest Chinese community in Europe, dating to the arrival of Chinese seamen in the 19th century.^[337] In 2011, 87.2 per cent of the UK population identified themselves as white, meaning 12.8 per cent of the UK population identify themselves as of one of an ethnic minority group.^[338]

Ethnic group		Population (absolute)		Population (per cent)	
		2001	2011	2001 ^[339]	2011 ^[338]
White		54,153,898	55,010,359	92.1%	87.1%
White: Gypsy, Traveller and Irish Traveller ^[r]		–	63,193	–	0.1%
Asian and Asian British	Indian	1,053,411	1,451,862	1.8%	2.3%
	Pakistani	747,285	1,174,983	1.3%	1.9%
	Bangladeshi	283,063	451,529	0.5%	0.7%
	Chinese	247,403	433,150	0.4%	0.7%
	Other Asian	247,664	861,815	0.4%	1.4%
Black, African, Caribbean and Black British ^[s]		1,148,738	1,904,684	2.0%	3.0%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups		677,117	1,250,229	1.2%	2.0%
Other ethnic groups		230,615	580,374	0.4%	0.9%
Total		58,789,194	63,182,178	100.0%	100.0%

Ethnic diversity varies significantly across the UK. 30.4 per cent of London's population and 37.4 per cent of Leicester's was estimated to be non-white in 2005,^[342] whereas less than 5 per cent of the populations of North East England, Wales and the South West were from ethnic minorities, according to the 2001 census.^[343] In 2016, 31.4 per cent of primary and 27.9 per cent of secondary pupils at state schools in England were members of an ethnic minority.^[344]

Languages

The English language is the official and most spoken language of the United Kingdom.^{[345][346]} The United Kingdom proactively promotes the language globally to build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.^{[347][348]} It is estimated that 95 per cent of the UK's population are monolingual English speakers.^[349] 5.5 per cent of the population are estimated to speak languages brought to the UK as a result of relatively recent immigration.^[349] South Asian languages are the largest grouping which includes Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Sylheti, Hindi, Pahari-Pothwari, Tamil, and

Gujarati.^[350] According to the 2011 census, Polish has become the second-largest language spoken in England and has 546,000 speakers.^[351] In 2019, some three-quarters of a million people spoke little or no English.^[352]

Three indigenous Celtic languages are spoken in the UK: Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Cornish, which became extinct as a first language in the late 18th century, is subject to revival efforts and has a small group of second language speakers.^{[353][2]} According to the 2021 census, the Welsh-speaking population of Wales aged three or older was 538,300 people (17.8 per cent).^[354] In addition, it is estimated that about 200,000 Welsh speakers live in England.^[355] In the 2021 census in Northern Ireland 12.4% of people had some ability in the Irish language and 10.4% of people had some ability in the Ulster-Scots language.^[356] Over 92,000 people in Scotland (just under 2 per cent of the population) had some Gaelic language ability, including 72 per cent of those living in the Outer Hebrides.^[357] The number of children being taught either Welsh or Scottish Gaelic is increasing.^[358] Scots, a language descended from early northern Middle English, has limited recognition alongside its regional variant, Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland, without specific commitments to protection and promotion.^{[2][359]} As of April 2020, there are said to be around 151,000 users of British Sign Language (BSL), a sign language used by deaf people, in the UK.^[360]

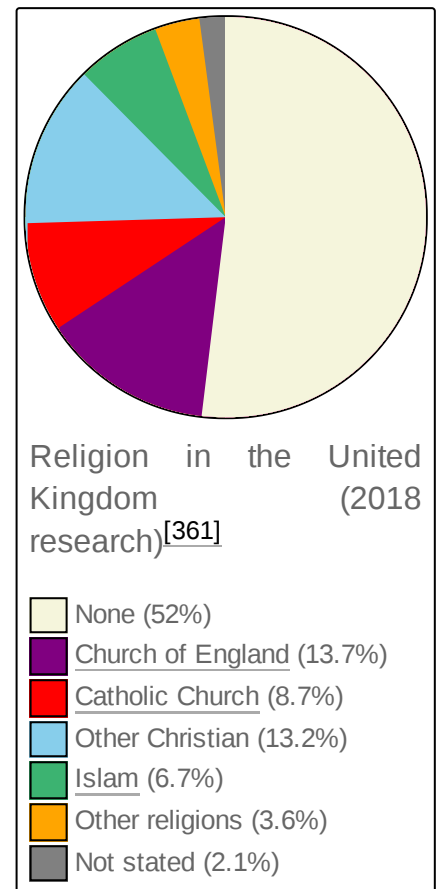


Bilingual sign (Irish and English) in Newry, Northern Ireland

Religion

Forms of Christianity have dominated religious life in what is now the United Kingdom for more than 1,400 years.^[362] Although a majority of citizens still identify with Christianity in many surveys, regular church attendance has fallen dramatically since the middle of the 20th century,^[363] while immigration and demographic change have contributed to the growth of other faiths, most notably Islam.^[364] This has led some commentators to variously describe the UK as a multi-faith,^[365] secularised,^[366] or post-Christian society.^[367]

In the 2001 census, 71.6 per cent of all respondents indicated that they were Christians, with the next largest faiths being Islam (2.8 per cent), Hinduism (1.0 per cent), Sikhism (0.6 per cent), Judaism (0.5 per cent), Buddhism (0.3 per cent) and all other religions (0.3 per cent).^[368] Of the respondents, 15 per cent stated that they had no religion and a further 7 per cent did not state a religious preference.^[369] A Tearfund survey in 2007 showed that only one in ten Britons actually attend church weekly.^[370] Between the 2001 and 2011 census, there was a 12 per cent decrease in the number of people who identified as Christian, while the percentage of those reporting no religious affiliation doubled. This contrasted with growth in the other main religious group categories, with the number of Muslims increasing by the most substantial margin to a total of about 5 per cent.^[371] The Muslim population has increased from 1.6 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2011, making it the second-largest religious group in the UK.^[372]

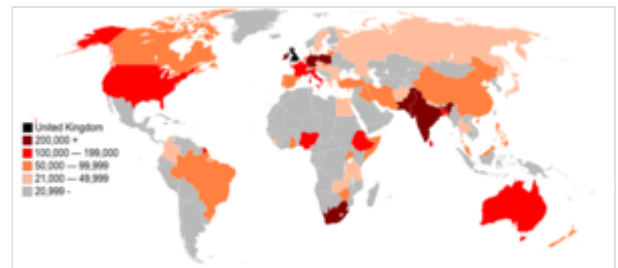


The Church of England is the established church in England.^[373] It retains a representation in the UK Parliament, and the British monarch is its Supreme Governor.^[374] In Scotland, the Church of Scotland is recognised as the national church. It is not subject to state control, and the British monarch is an ordinary member, required to swear an oath to "maintain and preserve the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government" upon his or her accession.^{[375][2][376]} The Church in Wales was disestablished in 1920 and, because the Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1870 before the partition of Ireland, there is no established church in Northern Ireland.^[377] Although there are no UK-wide data in the 2001 census on adherence to individual Christian denominations, it has been estimated that 62 per cent of Christians are Anglican, 13.5 per cent Catholic, 6 per cent Presbyterian, and 3.4 per cent Methodist, with small numbers of other Protestant denominations such as Plymouth Brethren, and Orthodox churches.^[378]

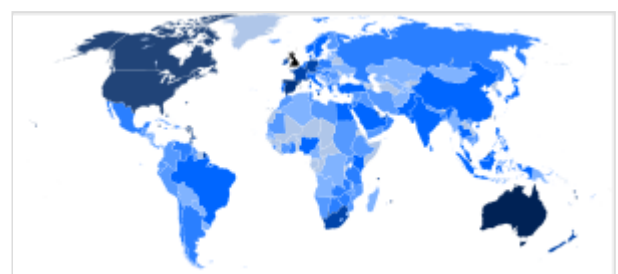
Migration

Immigration is now contributing to a rising UK population,^[379] with arrivals and UK-born children of migrants accounting for about half of the population increase between 1991 and 2001. According to official statistics released in 2015, 27 per cent of UK live births in 2014 were to mothers born outside the UK.^[380] The ONS reported that net migration rose from 2009 to 2010 by 21 per cent to 239,000.^[381]

In 2013, approximately 208,000 foreign nationals were naturalised as British citizens, the highest number since 1962. This figure fell to around 125,800 in 2014. Between 2009 and 2013, the average number of British citizenships granted annually was 195,800. The most common previous nationalities of those naturalised in 2014 were Indian, Pakistani, Filipino, Nigerian, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Chinese, South African, Polish and Somali.^[382] The total number of grants of settlement, which confer permanent residence in the UK but not citizenship,^[383] was approximately 154,700 in 2013, higher than the previous two years.^[382]



Estimated foreign-born population by country of birth from April 2007 to March 2008



Estimated number of British citizens living overseas by country in 2006

Emigration was an important feature of British society in the 19th century. Between 1815 and 1930, around 11.4 million people emigrated from Britain and 7.3 million from Ireland. Estimates show that by the end of the 20th century, some 300 million people of British and Irish descent were permanently settled around the globe.^[384] Today, at least 5.5 million UK-born people live abroad,^{[385][386]} mainly in Australia, Spain, the United States and Canada.^{[385][387]}

Education

Education in the United Kingdom is a devolved matter, with each country having a separate education system. About 38 per cent of the United Kingdom population has a university or college degree, which is the highest percentage in Europe, and among the highest percentages in the world.^[388] The United

Kingdom is home to many universities, including the University of Oxford and University of Cambridge which often achieve first place on global rankings.^{[389][390]}

University education has varied tuition fees between the different regions of the UK. England and Wales have a fixed maximum annual fee for all UK citizens. Northern Ireland and Scotland have a reduced maximum fee or no fee for citizens where it is their home region. Some NHS courses have bursaries which pay the fee and in 2017 it was stated that each doctor gets subsidised by £230,000 during their training.^{[391][392]}



University of Oxford is widely regarded as one of the world's leading universities.

In 2022, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), coordinated by the OECD, ranked the overall knowledge and skills of British 15-year-olds as 14th in the world in reading, mathematics and science. The average British student scored 494, well above the OECD average of 478.^{[393][394]}

Healthcare

The modern-system of universal publicly funded in the United Kingdom has its origins in the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1949 which still exists to this day and is the primary healthcare provider in the United Kingdom. The widespread popularity of the NHS has led to it being described as a "national religion".^{[395][396]} Healthcare in the United Kingdom is a devolved matter and each country has its own system of universal publicly funded healthcare, although private healthcare is also available. Public healthcare is provided to all UK permanent residents and is mostly free at the point of need, being paid for from general taxation. The World Health Organization, in 2000, ranked the provision of healthcare in the United Kingdom as fifteenth best in Europe and eighteenth in the world.^[397]



NHS Scotland's Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow, the largest hospital campus in Europe

Since 1979, expenditure on healthcare has been increased significantly.^[398] The 2018 OECD data, which incorporates in health a chunk of what in the UK is classified as social care, has the UK spending £3,121 per head.^[399] In 2017 the UK spent £2,989 per person on healthcare, around the median for members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.^[400]

Regulatory bodies are organised on a UK-wide basis such as the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and non-governmental-based, such as the Royal Colleges. Political and operational responsibility for healthcare lies with four national executives; healthcare in England is the responsibility of the UK Government; healthcare in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive; healthcare in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Government; and healthcare in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Government. Each National Health Service has different policies and priorities, resulting in contrasts.^[401]

Culture

The culture of the United Kingdom is influenced by many factors including: the nation's island status; its history; and being a political union of four countries with each preserving elements of distinctive traditions, customs and symbolism. As a result of the British Empire, British influence can be observed in the language, culture and legal systems of many of its former colonies, in particular, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Ireland, a common culture known today as the Anglosphere.^{[402][403]} The substantial cultural influence of the United Kingdom has led to it being described as a "cultural superpower".^{[108][109]} A global survey in 2023 ranked the UK 3rd in the 'Most Influential Countries' rankings (behind the US and China).^[404]

Literature

British literature includes literature associated with the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. Most British literature is in English. In 2005, some 206,000 books were published in the United Kingdom and in 2006 it was the largest publisher of books in the world.^[405]

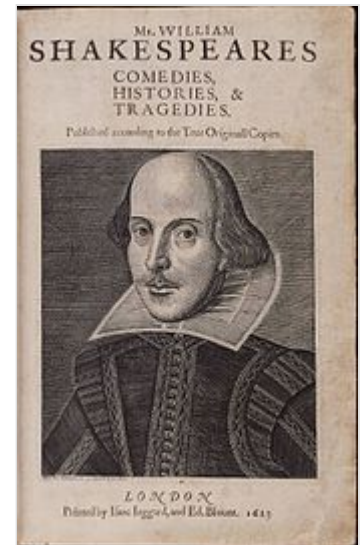
The English playwright and poet William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest dramatist of all time.^[406] The 20th-century English crime writer Agatha Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time.^[407] Twelve of the top 25 of 100 novels by British writers chosen by a BBC poll of global critics were written by women; these included works by George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, Doris Lessing and Zadie Smith.^[408]

Scotland's contributions include Arthur Conan Doyle (the creator of Sherlock Holmes), Sir Walter Scott, J. M. Barrie, Robert Louis Stevenson and the poet Robert Burns. More recently Hugh MacDiarmid and Neil M. Gunn contributed to the Scottish Renaissance, with grimmer works from Ian Rankin and Iain Banks. Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, was UNESCO's first worldwide City of Literature.^[409]

Welsh literature includes Britain's oldest known poem, Y Gododdin, which was composed most likely in the late 6th century. It was written in Cumbric or Old Welsh and contains the earliest known reference to King Arthur.^[410] The Arthurian legend was further developed by Geoffrey of Monmouth.^[411] Poet Dafydd ap Gwilym (fl. 1320–1370) is regarded as one of the greatest European poets of his age.^[412] Daniel Owen is credited as the first Welsh-language novelist, publishing Rhys Lewis in 1885. The best-known of the Anglo-Welsh poets are Dylan Thomas and R. S. Thomas, the latter nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1996. Leading Welsh novelists of the twentieth century include Richard Llewellyn and Kate Roberts.^{[413][414]}

Irish writers, living at a time when all of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, include Oscar Wilde,^[415] Bram Stoker^[416] and George Bernard Shaw.^[417] There have been many authors whose origins were from outside the United Kingdom but who moved to the UK, including Joseph Conrad,^[418] T. S. Eliot,^[419] Kazuo Ishiguro,^[420] Sir Salman Rushdie^[421] and Ezra Pound.^[422]

Philosophy



William Shakespeare's First Folio from 1623; a copy is on display in the British Library.

The United Kingdom is famous for the tradition of 'British Empiricism', a branch of the philosophy of knowledge that states that only knowledge verified by experience is valid, and 'Scottish Philosophy', sometimes referred to as the 'Scottish School of Common Sense'.^[423] The most famous philosophers of British Empiricism are John Locke, George Berkeley^[t] and David Hume; while Dugald Stewart, Thomas Reid and William Hamilton were major exponents of the Scottish "common sense" school. Two Britons are also notable for the ethical theory of utilitarianism, a moral philosophy first used by Jeremy Bentham and later by John Stuart Mill in his short work Utilitarianism.^[424]

Music

Various styles of music have become popular in the UK, including the indigenous folk music of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Historically, there has been exceptional Renaissance music from the Tudor period, with masses, madrigals and lute music by Thomas Tallis, John Taverner, William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons and John Dowland. After the Stuart Restoration, an English tradition of dramatic masques, anthems and airs became established, led by Henry Purcell, followed by Thomas Arne and others. The German-born composer George Frideric Handel became a naturalised British citizen in 1727, when he composed the anthem Zadok the Priest for the coronation of George II; it became the traditional ceremonial music for anointing all future monarchs. Handel's many oratorios, such as his famous Messiah, were written in the English language.^[425] In the second half of the 19th century, as Arthur Sullivan and his librettist W. S. Gilbert wrote their popular Savoy operas, Edward Elgar's wide range of music rivalled that of his contemporaries on the continent. Increasingly, however, composers became inspired by the English countryside and its folk music, notably Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Benjamin Britten, a pioneer of modern British opera. Among the many post-war composers, some of the most notable have made their own personal choice of musical identity: Peter Maxwell Davies (Orkney), Harrison Birtwistle (mythological), and John Tavener (religious).^[426] Today, recent classical singers include: Alfie Boe, Bryn Terfel, Katherine Jenkins, Michael Ball, Roderick Williams, Russell Watson and Sarah Brightman, while Nicola Benedetti and Nigel Kennedy are renowned for their violin ability.^[427]



The Proms is a classical music festival, most closely associated with Henry Wood and held at the Royal Albert Hall, which regularly plays music by Edward Elgar and other British composers.

According to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the term "pop music" originated in Britain in the mid-1950s to describe rock and roll's fusion with the "new youth music".^[428] *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* states that artists such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones drove pop music to the forefront of popular music in the early 1960s.^[429] Birmingham became known as the birthplace of heavy metal, with the band Black Sabbath starting there in the 1960s.^[430] In the following years, Britain widely occupied a part in the development of rock music, with British acts pioneering hard rock,^[431] raga rock; heavy metal,^[432] space rock; glam rock,^[433] Gothic rock,^[434] psychedelic rock,^[435] and punk rock.^[436] British acts also developed neo soul and created dubstep.^[437] The modern UK is known to produce some of the most prominent English-speaking rappers along with the United States, including Stormzy, Kano, Yxng Bane, Ramz, Little Simz and Skepta.^[438]

The Beatles have international sales of over 1 billion units and are the biggest-selling and most influential band in the history of popular music.^{[439][440][441][442]} Other prominent British contributors to have influenced popular music over the last 50 years include the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Queen, Led Zeppelin, the Bee Gees, and Elton John, all of whom have worldwide record sales of 200 million or more.^[443] The Brit Awards are the BPI's annual music awards, and some of the British recipients of the Outstanding Contribution to Music award include the Who, David Bowie, Eric Clapton, Rod Stewart, the Police, and Fleetwood Mac (who are a British-American band).^[444] More recent UK music acts that have had international success include George Michael, Oasis, Spice Girls, Radiohead, Coldplay, Arctic Monkeys, Robbie Williams, Amy Winehouse, Susan Boyle, Adele, Ed Sheeran, Lewis Capaldi, One Direction, Harry Styles and Dua Lipa.^[445]



The Beatles are the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed band in popular music, selling over a billion records.^{[439][440][441]}

A number of UK cities are known for their music. Acts from Liverpool have had 54 UK chart number 1 hit singles, more per capita than any other city worldwide.^[446] Glasgow's contribution to music was recognised in 2008 when it was named a UNESCO City of Music.^[447] Manchester played a role in the spread of dance music such as acid house, and from the mid-1990s, Britpop. London and Bristol are closely associated with the origins of electronic music sub-genres such as drum and bass and trip hop.^[448]

UK dance music traces its roots back to the Black British Sound System Culture and the New Age Traveller movement of the 60s and 70s,^[449] it also has influences from New Wave and Synth-pop such as from bands New Order and Depeche Mode^[450] and also has influences from the Chicago House and Detroit Techno scenes. In the late 80's, dance music exploded with Rave culture mainly Acid House tracks which were made mainstream with novelty records (such as Smart E's Sesame's Treet and the Prodigy's Charly)^[451] and the Balearic sound brought back from the Ibiza club scene. This led on to genres such as UK Garage, Speed Garage, Drum and bass, Jungle, Trance and Dubstep. Influential UK dance acts past and present include 808 State, Orbital, the Prodigy, Underworld, Roni Size, Leftfield, Massive Attack, Groove Armada, Fatboy Slim, Faithless, Basement Jaxx, Chemical Brothers, Sub Focus, Chase & Status, Disclosure, Calvin Harris and Fred Again.^[452] Other influential UK DJs include Judge Jules, Pete Tong, Carl Cox, Paul Oakenfold, John Digweed and Sasha.^[453]

Visual art

Major British artists include: the Romantics William Blake, John Constable, Samuel Palmer and J. M. W. Turner; the portrait painters Sir Joshua Reynolds and Lucian Freud; the landscape artists Thomas Gainsborough and L. S. Lowry; the pioneer of the Arts and Crafts Movement William Morris; the figurative painter Francis Bacon; the Pop artists Peter Blake, Richard Hamilton and David Hockney; the pioneers of Conceptual art movement Art & Language,^[454] the collaborative duo Gilbert and George; the abstract artist Howard Hodgkin; and the sculptors Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and Henry Moore. During the late 1980s and 1990s



William Morris textile design, 1883

the Saatchi Gallery in London helped to bring to public attention a group of multi-genre artists who would become known as the "Young British Artists": Damien Hirst, Chris Ofili, Rachel Whiteread, Tracey Emin, Mark Wallinger, Steve McQueen, Sam Taylor-Wood and the Chapman Brothers are among the better-known members of this loosely affiliated movement.



The Angel of the North sculpture by Antony Gormley has become a symbol of northern England.

The Royal Academy in London is a key organisation for the promotion of the visual arts in the United Kingdom. Major schools of art in the UK include: the six-school University of the Arts London, which includes the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and Chelsea College of Art and Design; Goldsmiths, University of London; the Slade School of Fine Art (part of University College London); the Glasgow School of Art; the Royal College of Art; and The Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art (part of the University of Oxford). The Courtauld Institute of Art is a leading centre for the teaching of the history of art. Important art galleries in the United Kingdom include the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain and Tate Modern (the most-visited modern art gallery in the world, with around 4.7 million visitors per year).^[455]

Cinema

The United Kingdom has had a considerable influence on the history of the cinema. The British directors Alfred Hitchcock, whose film Vertigo is considered by some critics as the best film of all time,^[456] and David Lean who directed Lawrence of Arabia are among the most critically acclaimed directors of all time.^[457] Recent popular directors include: Christopher Nolan, Sam Mendes, Steve McQueen, Danny Boyle, Tony Scott and Ridley Scott.^[458] ^[459] ^[460] Many British actors have achieved international fame and critical success. Some of the most commercially successful films of all time have been produced in the United Kingdom, including two of the highest-grossing film franchises (Harry Potter and James Bond).^[461]

2019 was a particularly good year for British films which grossed around £10.3 billion globally which was 28.7% of global box office revenue.^[462] UK box-office takings totalled £1.25 billion in 2019, with around 176 million admissions.^[463] In 2023 UK film and television studio stage space stands at 6.9 million sq ft, with 1 million sq ft added in the past year with more in development.^[464] The annual BAFTA Film Awards are hosted by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.^[465]

Cuisine

British cuisine developed from various influences reflective of its land, settlements, arrivals of new settlers and immigrants, trade and colonialism. The food of England has historically been characterised by its simplicity of approach and a reliance on the high quality of natural produce.^[466] The traditional Sunday roast is one example, featuring a roasted joint, usually of beef, lamb, chicken or pork, often free range (and generally grass-fed, in the case of beef). Roasts are served with either roasted or boiled vegetables, Yorkshire pudding, and gravy. Other traditional meals include meat pies and various stews.

A 2019 YouGov poll rated classic British food, the following had more than 80% of people like them who had tried them: Sunday roast, Yorkshire pudding, Fish and chips, Crumpets, and Full English breakfast.^[467]

The British Empire facilitated a knowledge of Indian cuisine with its "strong, penetrating spices and herbs". British cuisine has absorbed the cultural influence of those who have settled in Britain, producing hybrid dishes, such as chicken tikka masala.^[468] The British have embraced world cuisine and regularly eat recipes or fast food from Europe, the Caribbean and Asia.

Sweet foods are common within British cuisine, and there is a long list of British desserts. Afternoon tea is a light afternoon meal served with tea in tea rooms and hotels around the United Kingdom, with the tradition dating back to around 1840.^[469]



Fish and chips, a traditional British dish served with lemon, tartar sauce and mushy peas

Vegan and vegetarian diets have increased in Britain in recent years. In 2021, a survey found that 8% of British respondents eat a plant-based diet and 36% of respondents have a favourable view of plant-based diets.^[470]

Media

The BBC, founded in 1922, is the UK's publicly funded radio, television and Internet broadcasting corporation, and is the oldest and largest broadcaster in the world.^{[471][472][473]} It operates numerous television and radio stations in the UK and abroad and its domestic services are funded by the television licence.^[474] The BBC World Service is an international broadcaster owned and operated by the BBC. It is the world's largest of any kind.^[475] It broadcasts radio news, speech and discussions in more than 40 languages.^[476]



MediaCityUK in Salford, Greater Manchester is one of the largest media production facilities in Europe.

Other major players in the UK media include ITV, which operates 11 of the 15 regional television broadcasters that make up the ITV Network,^[477] and Sky.^[478] Newspapers produced in the United Kingdom include the *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, and the *Financial Times*.^[479] Magazines and journals published in the United Kingdom that have achieved worldwide circulation include *The Spectator*, *The Economist*, *New Statesman*, and *Radio Times*.

London dominates the media sector in the UK: national newspapers and television and radio are largely based there, although MediaCityUK in Manchester is also a significant national media centre. Edinburgh and Glasgow, and Cardiff, are important centres of newspaper and broadcasting production in Scotland and Wales, respectively.^[480] The UK publishing sector, including books, directories and databases, journals, magazines and business media, newspapers and news agencies, has a combined turnover of around £20 billion and employs around 167,000 people.^[481] In 2015, the UK published 2,710 book titles per million inhabitants, more than any other country, much of this being exported to other Anglophone countries.^[482]

In 2010, 82.5 per cent of the UK population were Internet users, the highest proportion among the 20 countries with the largest total number of users in that year.^[483] The British video game industry is the largest in Europe, and, since 2022, the UK has the largest video game market in Europe by sales,

overtaking Germany.^[484] It is the world's third-largest producer of video games after Japan and the United States.^[485]

Sport

Association football, tennis, table tennis, badminton, rugby union, rugby league, rugby sevens, golf, boxing, netball, water polo, field hockey, billiards, darts, rowing, rounders and cricket originated or were substantially developed in the UK, with the rules and codes of many modern sports invented and codified in late 19th-century Victorian Britain.^[u]

A 2003 poll found that football is the most popular sport in the UK.^[488] England is recognised by FIFA as the birthplace of club football, and the Football Association is the oldest of its kind, with the rules of football first drafted in 1863 by Ebenezer Cobb Morley.^[489] Each of the Home Nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) has its own football association, national team and league system, and each is individually a governing member of the International Football Association Board alongside FIFA. The English top division, the Premier League, is the most watched football league in the world.^[490] The first international football match was contested by England and Scotland on 30 November 1872.^[491] England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland usually compete as separate countries in international competitions.^[492]

In 2003, rugby union was ranked the second most popular sport in the UK.^[488] The sport was created in Rugby School, Warwickshire, and the first rugby international took place on 27 March 1871 between England and Scotland.^{[493][494]} England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France and Italy compete in the Six Nations Championship, which is the premier international rugby union tournament in the northern hemisphere. Sports governing bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland organise and regulate the game separately.^[495] Every four years, the Home Nations make a combined team known as the British and Irish Lions which tours Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

The United Kingdom hosted the Summer Olympic Games in 1908, 1948 and 2012, with London acting as the host city on all three occasions. Birmingham hosted the 2022 Commonwealth Games, the seventh time a constitute country in the United Kingdom hosted the Commonwealth Games (England, Scotland and Wales have each hosted the Commonwealth Games at least once).^[496]

Symbols

The flag of the United Kingdom is the Union Flag (also referred to as the Union Jack).^[497] It was created in 1606 by the superimposition of the flag of England, representing Saint George, on the flag of Scotland, representing Saint Andrew, and was updated in 1801 with the addition of Saint Patrick's Flag.^[498] Wales is not represented in the Union Flag, as Wales had been conquered and annexed to England prior to the



The 2023 FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium between Manchester City and Manchester United



Golf originated from the Old Course at St Andrews in Scotland.

formation of the United Kingdom. The possibility of redesigning the Union Flag to include representation of Wales has not been completely ruled out.^[499] The national anthem of the United Kingdom is "God Save the King", with "King" replaced with "Queen" in the lyrics whenever the monarch is a woman.

Britannia is a national personification of the United Kingdom, originating from Roman Britain.^[500] Beside The Lion and the Unicorn and the dragon of heraldry, the bulldog is an iconic animal and commonly represented with the Union Flag.^[501] A now rare personification is a character originating in the 18th century, John Bull.^[502]



Union Jack flags on The Mall, London

England, Wales, and Scotland each have a number of their own national symbols, including their national flags. Northern Ireland also has a number of symbols, many of which are shared with Republic of Ireland.

See also

- Outline of the United Kingdom
 - Outline of England
 - Outline of Northern Ireland
 - Outline of Scotland
 - Outline of Wales
- Index of United Kingdom-related articles
- International rankings of the United Kingdom
- Historiography of the United Kingdom
- Historiography of the British Empire
- United Kingdom–Crown Dependencies Customs Union

Notes

- a. "God Save the King" is the National Anthem by custom, not statute, and there is no authorised version. Only the first verse is usually sung.^[1] The words *King*, *he*, *him*, *his*, used at present, are replaced by *Queen*, *she*, *her* when the monarch is female.
- b. Scots, Ulster Scots, Welsh, Cornish, Scottish Gaelic and Irish are classed as regional or minority languages under the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.^[2] These include defined obligations to promote those languages.^[3] See also Languages of the United Kingdom. Welsh has limited *de jure* official status in Wales, as well as in the provision of national government services provided for Wales.
- c. Although the United Kingdom has traditionally been seen as a unitary state, an alternative description of the UK as a "union state", put forward by, among others, Vernon Bogdanor,^[4] has become increasingly influential since the adoption of devolution in the 1990s.^[5] A union state is considered to differ from a unitary state in that while it maintains a central authority it also recognises the authority of historic rights and infrastructures of its component parts.^[6]
- d. ONS Standard Area Measurement, 'area to mean high water'. Excludes Channel Islands, Isle of Man and British Overseas Territories.

- e. ONS Standard Area Measurement, 'area to mean high water excluding inland water'. Excludes Channel Islands, Isle of Man and British Overseas Territories.
- f. Some of the devolved countries, Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories issue their own sterling banknotes or currencies, or use another nation's currency. See List of British currencies.
- g. Also observed by the Crown Dependencies. For further information, see Time in the United Kingdom#British territories.
- h. Except two overseas territories: Gibraltar and the British Indian Ocean Territory
- i. Excludes most overseas territories
- j. The .gb domain is also reserved for the UK, but has been little used.
- k. Usage is mixed. The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/guardian-observer-style-guide-u>) and Telegraph (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/style-book/places-and-people>) use Britain as a synonym for the United Kingdom. Some prefer to use Britain as shorthand for Great Britain. The British Cabinet Office's Government Digital Service style guide (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/style-guide/a-to-z-of-gov-uk-style#great-britain>) for use on gov.uk recommends: "Use UK and United Kingdom in preference to Britain and British (UK business, UK foreign policy, ambassador and high commissioner). But British embassy, not UK embassy."
- l. The Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey are Crown Dependencies and not part of the UK.
- m. The United Kingdom does not have a codified constitution but an unwritten one formed of Acts of Parliament, court judgments, traditions, and conventions.^[23]
- n. Compare to section 1 of both of the 1800 Acts of Union which reads: the *Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland shall...be united into one Kingdom, by the Name of "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland"*.
- o. British sovereignty derives from the Crown, a corporation sole occupied by the monarch. It is therefore by and through the monarch that Parliament exercises supreme legislative authority over both the executive and judiciary. Distinguished Professor of Public Law Maurice Sunkin opined the Crown symbolically occupies "...what in other places would be a core element of a written constitution."^[162] As a result of this state of constitutional affairs, the monarch is formally referred to as "the Sovereign" in legislation.^[163]
- p. For instance, the monarch alone appoints the prime minister and confers state honours in the personal gift of the Crown. When necessary, the monarch may also refuse a dissolution or prorogation of Parliament, withhold royal assent to primary legislation, and prevent illegal use of the British Armed Forces, among other reserve powers.^[170]
- q. Real GDP is an inflation adjusted GDP which is needed if you need to study changes in volume rather than value especially if the currency devalues due to the inflation but does not show current market values.^[253]
- r. The 2011 Census recorded Gypsies and Travellers as a separate ethnic group for the first time.
- s. In the 2011 Census, for the purpose of harmonising results to make them comparable across the UK, the ONS includes individuals in Scotland who classified themselves in the "African" category (29,638 people), which in the Scottish version of the census is separate from "Caribbean or Black" (6,540 people),^[340] in this "Black or Black British" category. The ONS note that "the African categories used in Scotland could potentially capture White/Asian/Other African in addition to Black identities".^[341]
- t. Berkeley is in fact Irish but was called a 'British empiricist' due to the territory of what is now known as the Republic of Ireland being in the UK at the time.

- u. In 2012, the President of the IOC, Jacques Rogge, stated, "This great, sports-loving country is widely recognised as the birthplace of modern sport. It was here that the concepts of sportsmanship and fair play were first codified into clear rules and regulations. It was here that sport was included as an educational tool in the school curriculum".^{[486][487]}

References

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- [Key Development Forecasts for the United Kingdom](http://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=GB) (http://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=GB) from [International Futures](#)

Government

- [Official website of HM Government](https://www.gov.uk/) (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
- [Official website of the British Monarchy](http://www.royal.gov.uk/) (<http://www.royal.gov.uk/>)
- [Official website of the British Prime Minister's Office](http://www.number10.gov.uk/) (<http://www.number10.gov.uk/>)

Travel

- [Official tourist guide to Britain](http://www.visitbritain.com/en/EN/) (<http://www.visitbritain.com/en/EN/>)

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