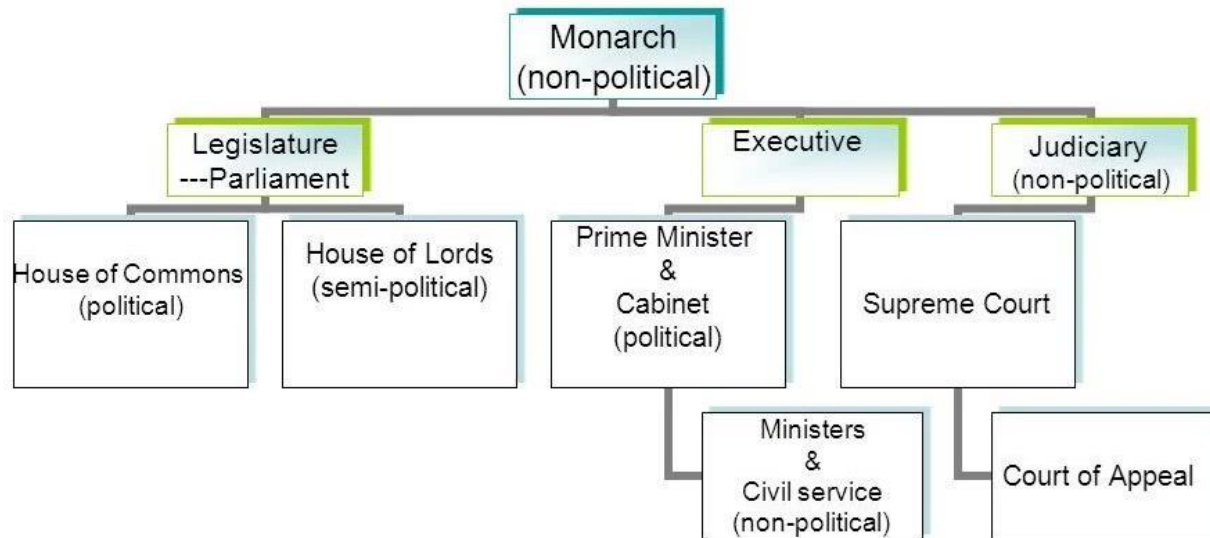


British & US Culture & Society (Pr. El Hadari)

- Lecture 2: Government structure & religion in the UK -

➤ Government in the UK:



The form of government adopted in the UK is constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system.

The constitution limits the power of the monarchy. **The Queen is the Head of State** but she is not the only source of power. There is a government that works along with the Queen under the leadership of the **prime minister**. There is a parliament which has the power and ability to make and pass **Legislation (Laws, bills and acts)**.

The Queen plays an important role in the life of British nation, but **she does not interfere in political matters**, she no longer has a political role. She represents national identity, security, pride, unity. She gives feelings of stability and guarantees continuity. She supports and encourages success and excellence and, in the mean time she boosts good experience of voluntary work.

The UK parliament has two main **Houses: House of Commons and House of Lords**. These two houses are charged with the task of checking and challenging the work of government making and passing legislation. They are **650** members in the House of Commons. These members are elected. Their role is to consider and propose new laws. They have the rights and power to scrutinize (examine) and question the work of government. They can ask ministers questions about current issues and problems.

A **bill** is a proposal for a **new law** or a **proposal** to exchange and existing law. Bills are presented, discussed, examined in the parliament for approval or disapproval. When the bill is approved by the parliament it becomes a law. There is something very important that should take place at this stage. It is **royal assent** an act of parliament is a law enforced in all areas/regions of the UK where it is applicable.

As the second House (House of Lords) of UK parliament it plays a vital role in **scrutinizing bills**, questioning the work of the government and investigating public policy, it is called the **upper House** of the UK parliament. The members of this house are not elected. They are those who have done something important to British nation. Membership is by appointment, heredity or official function. Both Houses meet in **The Palace of Westminster**.

The UK political system is most often described as a **Two-party system**. Since the beginning of the twentieth century two political parties have dominated the political scene in the UK: The conservative party and the labor party.

➤ **Religion in the UK:**

The UK is most described as a **secular state**, which means that it is neutral in matters of religion. It supports neither religion nor irreligion. It treats all citizens equally regardless of religion. **There is no official religion in the UK**. Citizens have the freedom to do their religious practices. **The dominant religion is Christianity**. According to recent statistics conducted at the beginning of this new millennium there is a decline (decrease) in church membership. For example, the church-statistics covering the period **2005 - 2015** shows that the UK church membership has dropped from **10.6 million** in **1930** to **5.5 million** in **2010**. In **2013** it dropped to **5.4 million**. If current trends continue in this way, membership will fall from **10.3%** in **2013** to **8.4%** in **2025**. There are different **religious affiliations** in the UK such as **Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and among many others**. Christians are the largest religious group and Muslims are the second.