

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**, commonly known as the **United Kingdom (UK)** or **Britain**,^[m] is a country in [Northwestern Europe](#), off the coast of [the continental mainland](#).^{[21][22]} It comprises [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#), and [Northern Ireland](#).^{[n][23]} 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](#), making up a total area of 94,354 square miles (244,376 km²).^{[f][12][24]} 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 United Kingdom had an estimated population of over 68.2 million people in 2023.^[13] The capital and largest city of both England and the United Kingdom is [London](#), [whose wider metropolitan area](#) is the largest in [Western Europe](#), with a population of 14.9 million.^[25] The cities of [Edinburgh](#), [Cardiff](#), and [Belfast](#) are the national capitals of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, respectively.

The lands of the UK have been inhabited continuously since the [Neolithic](#). In AD 43 the [Roman conquest of Britain](#) began; the [Roman departure](#) was followed by [Anglo-Saxon settlement](#). In 1066, [the Normans conquered England](#). With the end of the [Wars of the Roses](#) the English state stabilised and began to grow in power, resulting by the 16th century in the [annexation of Wales](#), the [domination of Scotland](#), and the establishment of the [British Empire](#). Over the course of the 17th century, the role of the British monarchy was reduced, particularly as a result of the [English Civil War](#). In 1707, the [Kingdom of England](#) 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 United Kingdom.

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.^{[26][27]} 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.^{[28][29][30]}

The United Kingdom is a [constitutional monarchy](#) and [parliamentary democracy](#).^{[o][32]} The UK has three distinct jurisdictions: [England and Wales](#), [Scotland](#), and [Northern Ireland](#).^[33] Since 1999, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own governments and parliaments which control various [devolved](#) matters.^[34] A [developed country](#), the UK has the world's [sixth-largest economy by nominal gross domestic product](#) (GDP). It is a [nuclear state](#), and is ranked [fifth globally in military expenditure](#).^{[35][36]} 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](#), [Council of Europe](#), [G7](#), [OECD](#), [NATO](#), [Five Eyes](#), [AUKUS](#) and [CPTPP](#). 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](#).^[37]