

United Kingdom

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The UK is a majoritarian parliamentary democracy throughout the period of study. The main parties during this period are the Conservative party, the Labour Party, and the Liberal Party. At the entry date of the dataset in 1920, Britain was governed by Lloyd George of the Liberal party, which was in coalition with the Conservative party. Lloyd George stepped down in 1922, following the withdrawal of the conservative party from the coalition (BBC History 2011). Following elections the conservatives won a majority in parliament and Bonar Law took office as prime minister (SOLS change). Note that from the 1924 elections onwards the Liberal Party would play a minor role in the majoritarian system of the United Kingdom, as the Liberals became third to Labour and the Conservatives (History Annex 2011).

Bonar Law resigned because of health issues and was replaced by Conservative Prime Minister Baldwin (No SOLS change). After losing the majority in the House of Commons and following a vote of no confidence, Baldwin retired. Subsequently, Labour under MacDonald was for the first time in history asked by the King to form a minority government supported by the Liberals (SOLS change). MacDonald's government lasted for less than a year, however, and following elections, Baldwin returned to government, with his Conservative party holding a majority of the seats in parliament, which is coded as a SOLS change (Rubinstein 2003; History Annex 2011; worldstatesmen.org).

Following close elections in 1929 Baldwin lost to Labour; although neither party held a majority in parliament, Labour secured more seats. Baldwin resigned in favor of MacDonald, who subsequently formed a minority government that like in 1924 was supported by the Liberals (SOLS change) (Rubinstein 2003; worldstatesmen.org). Following political crisis induced by the Great Depression, a national government was formed on August 24, 1931, which included cabinet members of several parties including a splinter of the Labour party. New general elections to confirm the establishment of the National government resulted in the strengthening of the conservatives; however, as MacDonald remained Prime Minister, the change to National government was coded as a minor SOLS change - the date of government formation (August 24, 1931), was coded as the date of the minor SOLS change (National Archives –b; “Ramsay MacDonald” 2012, Durkin & White 2007). Following its establishment, the opposition to the National government came from parts of Labour outside the National government (Mowat 1955; Rubinstein 2003; worldstatesmen.org). In 1935 MacDonald resigned because of health reasons, and the Conservatives won the general election (SOLS change). (Jennings 1969, Mowat 1955, Robertson 1974) Hereafter the National government would continue under Conservative Leadership; first Baldwin, then Chamberlain, and finally Churchill. Jennings 1969 states on page 31, fn. 2: “The coalitions of . . . and 1940-1945 (Churchill Government) were peculiar in that one party had a majority but a coalition or “National” Government representing all parties was considered desirable for the efficient waging of war. Those from 1931-1940 (MacDonald, Baldwin, and Chamberlain Governments) were peculiar because, though the Conservative party had a majority and the Labour party was in opposition, it was thought desirable to pretend that they were ‘National’ Governments.” The war cabinet of Churchill included the parts of Labour that had opposed the prior government; Labour was now part of the coalition. Therefore we code a minor sols change at the war cabinet's entry on 10 May 1940 (Jeffreys 1998; National Archives –a; Jennings 1969; Mowat 1955; worldstatesmen.org).

The United Kingdom is coded as a parliamentary democracy from 1945 until 2008. Winston Churchill, a Conservative, ruled as Prime Minister over a wartime coalition government until May 23rd, 1945 (Pelling 1980, 404). The coalition included the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberals (Pelling 1980, 400). “When Churchill resigned as leader of the coalition government on 23 May he at once took office again as prime minister of a caretaker government, consisting mostly of Conservatives, but with a sprinkling of National Liberals and also non-party men such as the former civil servants Sir John Anderson and Sir James Grigg and the former business-man Lord Woolton” (Pelling 1980, 404). Elections were held July 5th and votes were counted July 26th (Pelling 1980, 407) after which Clement Attlee, Labour, became PM. This is a SOLS change. In 1951 (Sir) Winston Churchill, Conservative, became PM for a second time. This is a SOLS change. In 1955 Sir Anthony Eden, also Conservative, became PM. This is not a SOLS change. In 1957 Harold Macmillan, Conservative, became PM. This is not a SOLS change. In 1963 (Sir) Alec Douglas-Home, Conservative, became PM. This is not a SOLS change. In 1964 Harold Wilson, Labour, became PM. This is a SOLS change. In 1970 Edward Heath, Conservative, became PM. This is a SOLS change. In 1974 Harold Wilson, Labour, became PM for a second time. This is a SOLS change. In 1976 James Callaghan, Labour, became PM. This is not a SOLS change. In 1979 Margaret Thatcher, Conservative, became PM. This is a SOLS change. In 1990 John Major, Conservative, became PM. This is not a SOLS change. In 1997 Tony Blair, Labour, became PM. This is a SOLS change. In 2007 Gordon Brown, Labour, became PM. This is not a SOLS change.

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