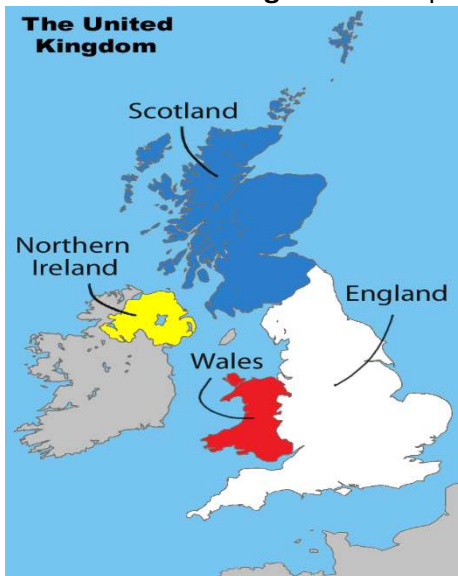


Chapter 4: The Disenchanted United Kingdom

In July 2024, a new wind of hope seemed to blow across the United Kingdom. However, one year into a Labour government, internal tensions have become increasingly visible. Immigration has once again taken centre stage, Reform UK has emerged as the main opposition party, and the cost-of-living crisis has yet to be effectively addressed, as the British economy continues to lag behind. Against this backdrop, this chapter seeks to examine the extent to which social cohesion in the United Kingdom has been weakened and to analyse the growing dynamics of political polarisation. Ultimately, it raises a central question: how united is the UK today?

The United Kingdom: the four nations and its political system

The United Kingdom is composed of four nations: **England, Scotland, Wales and Northern**



Ireland. Its flag is called “the Union Jack”. **Great Britain** (sometimes just referred to as “**Britain**”) is not really a country, it is the largest island in the British Isles, so it refers to the island which houses the countries of **England, Scotland and Wales.**

The currency is the pound (“*livre sterling*” in French), and its symbol is £.

1. Political System

The United Kingdom is a **parliamentary monarchy** (also called a constitutional monarchy). There is not a unique, founding text comparable to other nations’ Constitution. The country is governed by a series of statutes, court judgments, traditions and conventions that make up the country’s “unwritten” constitution.

The King (Charles III, “Charles the third”) has gradually come to have an essentially **symbolic** function as head of State (of the UK and also of the British Overseas Territories). He must remain

politically impartial. He “reigns but does not rule”.

The UK Parliament is a **bicameral** Parliament, it is composed of the **House of Commons** and the House of Lords (made up of non-elected members called peers). In the Commons, **MPs** (members of parliament) debate over government policy.



Chapter 4: The Disenchanted United Kingdom

In the Parliament, the two sides sit opposite to each other. The Parliament is located in the **Palace of Westminster** in London.

The two main parties are the **Conservative Party** (called the Tory Party) and the **Labour Party**. Following a **general election**, (every 5 years, or before if the PM calls for a general election) the party which has won the most seats in the House of Commons forms the ruling government, and the leader of the party becomes **Prime Minister** (PM). He is the head of the executive power. **Whitehall** is a road and area in Westminster that is occupied by numerous government departments and ministries. For this reason, "Whitehall" is commonly used to refer to the British government.

I- The 2024 general election (adapted from emilemagazine.fr)

4 July 2024: A landslide victory

In line with many polls predicting the outcome for months, the Labour party has won a landslide victory in the July 4th British general elections. Sir Keir Starmer's success is comparable to that of Tony Blair in May 1997 and opens a new chapter in contemporary British politics **after 14 years of Conservative power**. Noticeably, under Starmer's leadership, Labour has managed to overcome its internal divisions, to overhaul its policy platform, and to reconnect with voters lost in 2019. The party now promises to **stabilize and grow the economy**, tackle **the public services crisis**, and **reunite the country while keeping public finances under control**.



Past Prime Ministers – 21st century



The Rt Hon
MP
2022 to 2024



The Rt Hon

2022 to 2022



The Rt Hon
2019 to 2022



The Rt Hon
Conservative 2016 to
2019



The Rt Hon

Conservative 2010 to
2016



The Rt Hon Gordon
Brown
Labour 2007 to 2010