

QNO: 2 What are the characteristics of
of the UK's current political system?
Has this system been successful in
creating efficient mechanisms to ensure
adequate public participation in the
affairs of state?

ANSWER

① Introduction:

A constitution is the supreme law of any state. The UK constitution, similarly, has the oldest working constitution in the world. It evolved gradually from Magna Carta in 1215 wherein the King John subjected himself to law. Similarly, the bill of rights in 1689 and Human Rights Act in 1998 and so on. It's a parliamentary system of government and is uncodified at its core. It is flexible and adaptable and a living constitution. Though it apparently has a monarchy, it has a mix of democratic spirit and functions.

Therefore it is sometimes referred as the crowned republic as UK constitution is democratic at the bottom and crowned at the top.

② Prominent Elements of UK's constitution

(a) Uncodified, living constitution

The UK constitution is largely uncodified and living. It is derived from statutes (acts of parliament), conventions, judicial laws.

(b) Supremacy of Parliament

Parliament can make or change any law.

The House of Commons are elected Members of parliament which are currently 605 in number. Not even the courts or monarch can overrule their decision.

(C) Constitutional Monarchy

The monarch is the head of state. But it has no real power and titular in nature. It is reformed by elected government of the House of Commons.

(D) Representative Democracy

Laws are made by elected MPs in the House of Commons. There lies the true republican spirit of the parliament. Citizens participate through voting.

(E) Rule of Law

After Magna Carta in 1215 which is the foundation of the UK's Constitution, no one is above the law. Not even the monarch and prime minister.

(F) Flexible Constitution

No rigorous amendment procedure is required. The Parliament passes a bill and it becomes a law. Thus,

it is highly adaptable and living in nature."

(i) Bicameral Legislature

The UK constitution has a bicameral legislature. The upper House of Lords consists of hereditary peers and monarch which are selected.

While the House of Commons consists of elected members from the respective state.

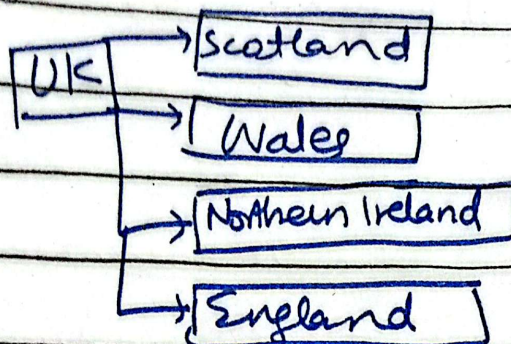
(ii) Success of UK Constitution in Ensuring Public Participation

(a) General Elections in House of Commons

General elections are held every 5 years. Citizens vote to elect Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons. These MPs represent public opinion and can be voted out if they violate the social contract.

(b) Separate local elections in all Nations

Local elections in the UK are organized separately within each of the four nations. Each has its own councils, election timetables, and voting systems.



* UK as a unitary state with multinational elements.

(c) Robust Media Network

The print media in UK such as Guardian and Reuters has a strong say in governmental affairs. They ensure checks and balances informally as the fourth pillar of state.

(d) Vigilant Public Opinion

Public literacy is high in the UK and their turnout in voting is quite

inspiring. The labor party regained power after 17 years just because of their lie to public regarding Iraq war.

(D) Devolved Powers to Constituent legislatures

Westminster parliament in London is the supreme legislature. However, each state within UK has its own legislature, but its powers are not guaranteed in constitution.

Thus, people of every state have an adequate yet limited say in law-making affairs.

(E) Direct Democracy Tools

From referendums to petitions to public consultations, public has a major say in running the affairs of the country. Brexit 2016 is a case in point wherein everyone was given a direct vote.

(F) High Voter Turnout

In 2019 General election, the voter turnout was 67.3 percent.

Thus, it shows the increased levels of participating governance in the British system.

(G) Institutionalized Public Engagement Mechanisms

Recently, the UK has institutionalized public engagement mechanism through statutory citizen's assembly beyond the traditional petitions and consultations.

The UK government has also announced to publish a Net Zero Public Participation Strategy later in 2025 to embed public opinion in decision-making.

(H) Strong opposition

UK political system is though unitary and highly centralized in nature. However, UK cabinet faces a strong opposition. Usually, Labour party comes to power in the UK system and it faces a strong opposition from conservative party in Parliament in Westminster.

Conclusion

Thus, it could be concluded that the UK's unitary and parliamentary system, though centralized, retains republican spirit in function. It ensures public participation despite being a rigid constitution. It has institutionalized public participation strategies to embed public opinion in decision-making and policy process.