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Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (Elizabeth Alexandra Mary), styled *HM The Queen*, born April 21, 1926, is the Queen regnant and Head of State of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and fifteen other Commonwealth countries. She is Head of the Commonwealth, Supreme Governor of the Church of England, Commander-in-Chief of the UK Armed Forces, and she is the Lord of Mann.

She has reigned since February 6, 1952. About 125 million people live in the countries of which she is head of state. Before her succession, she held the titles of a British princess and by marriage, Duchess of Edinburgh.

The Queen has never given press interviews, and her views on political issues are largely unknown except to those few heads of government who have private conversations with her. She is also regarded privately as an excellent mimic.

Rather conservative in dress, the Queen is well-known for her solid-colour overcoats and decorative hats, which allow her to be seen easily in a crowd. Although she attends many cultural events as part of her public role, in her private life the Queen is said to have little interest in culture or the arts. Her main leisure interests include horse racing, photography, and dogs, especially her Pembroke Welsh Corgis.

In diplomatic situations the Queen is extremely formal, and royal protocol is very strict. Though some of the traditional rules for dealing with the British Monarch have been relaxed during her reign (bowing is no longer required, for example)

other forms of close personal interaction, such as touching, are still discouraged. In 1992, the Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating was dubbed the "Lizard of Oz" by the British press for touching the Queen on the back, and in 2000 his successor John Howard had to deny that he too had touched the Queen. A similar flap occurred when Newfoundland and Labrador premier Brian Tobin was photographed touching the Queen's back as he accompanied her up a flight of stairs; he protested he was merely attempting to help an elderly lady avoid falling. The queen is also notably the subject of the Sex Pistols 1977 song "God Save the Queen".

Her former prime ministers speak highly of her. Since becoming Queen, she spends an average of three hours every day "doing the boxes"—reading state papers sent to her from her various departments, embassies, and government offices.

Having done so since 1952, she has seen more of public affairs from the inside than any other person, and is thus able to offer advice to Tony Blair based on things said to her by Harold Wilson, Harold Macmillan, Edward Heath, Winston Churchill and many other senior leaders. She takes her responsibilities in this regard seriously, once mentioning an "interesting telegram" from the Foreign Office to then-Prime Minister Winston Churchill, only to find that her prime minister had not bothered to read it when it came in his box!