

The UK Parliament

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The **Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**, commonly known as the **UK Parliament** or the **British Parliament**, is the supreme legislative body in the United Kingdom, British Crown dependencies and British overseas territories. It alone possesses legislative supremacy and thereby ultimate power over all other political bodies in the UK and its territories. Its head is the Sovereign of the United Kingdom (currently Queen Elizabeth II) and its seat is the Palace of Westminster in Westminster, London.



The parliament is bicameral, consisting of an upper house (**the House of Lords**) and a lower house (**the House of Commons**). The Sovereign forms the third component of the legislature (the Queen-in-Parliament). The House of Lords includes two different types of members: **the Lords Spiritual** (the senior bishops of the Church of England) and **the Lords Temporal** (members of the Peerage) whose members are not elected by the population at large, but are appointed by the Sovereign on the advice of the Prime Minister. Prior to the opening of the Supreme Court in October 2009, the House of Lords also performed a judicial role through the Law Lords.



The House of Commons is a democratically elected chamber with elections held at least every **five years**. The two Houses meet in separate chambers in the Palace of Westminster in London. By constitutional convention, all government ministers, including the Prime Minister, are members of the House of Commons – or, less commonly, the House of Lords – and are thereby accountable to the respective branches of the legislature.

House of Commons

Meeting place



Leadership

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Speaker | John Bercow Since 22 June 2009 |
| Leader | Chris Grayling, Conservative Since 9 May 2015 |
| Shadow Leader | Chris Bryant, Labour Since 13 September 2015 |
| Minor Shadow Leaders | Pete Wishart, SNP Tom Brake, LibDems Nigel Dodds, DUP |

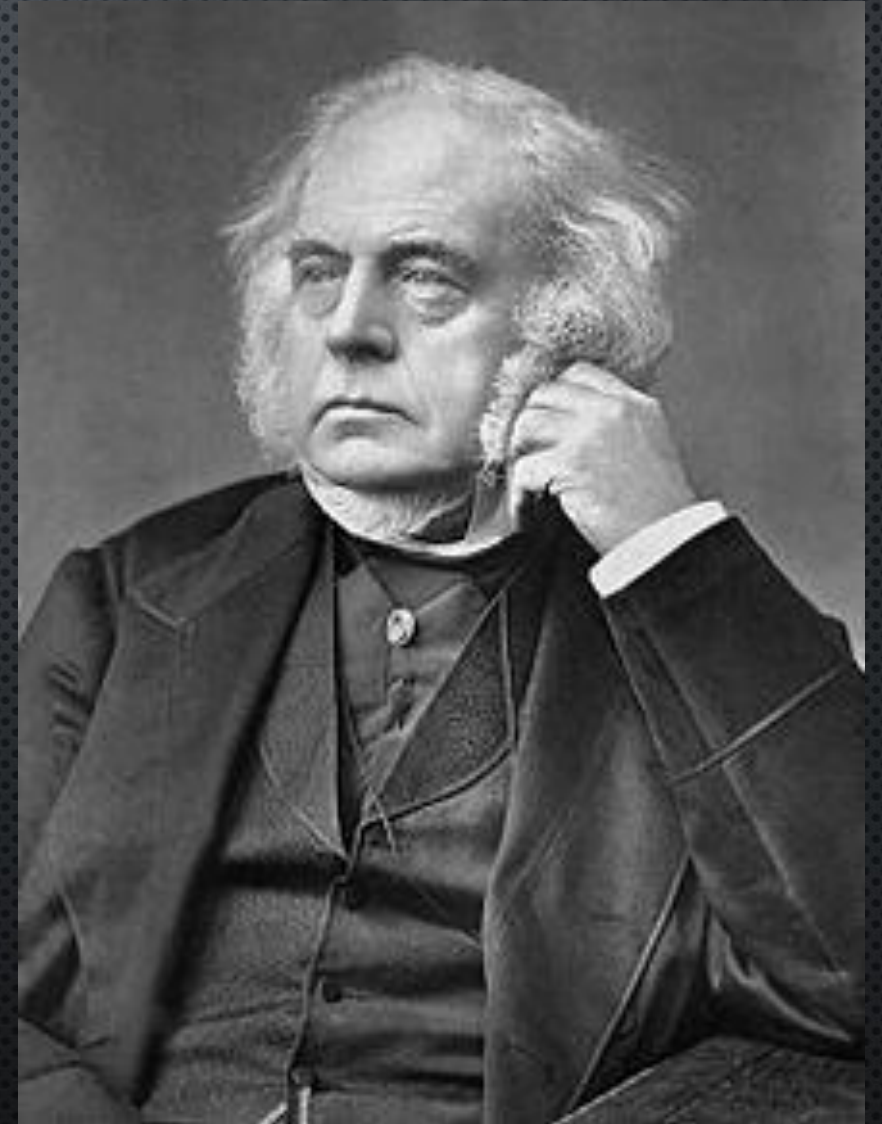
House of Lords Meeting place



| Leadership | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Lord Speaker | Frances D'Souza, Baroness D'Souza, non-affiliated ^[1] Since 1 September 2011 |
| Leader | Tina Stowell, Baroness Stowell of Beeston, Conservative Since 15 July 2014 |
| Opposition Leader | Angela Smith, Baroness Smith of Basildon, Labour Since 27 May 2015 |
| Lib. Dems Leader | Jim Wallace, Baron Wallace of Tankerness, Liberal Democrat Since October 2013 |

The Parliament of Great Britain was formed in **1707** following the ratification of the **Treaty of Union** by **Acts of Union** passed by the **Parliament of England** and the **Parliament of Scotland**. At the start of the nineteenth century, Parliament was further enlarged by **Acts of Union** ratified by the **Parliament of Great Britain** and the **Parliament of Ireland** that abolished the latter and added 100 Irish MPs and 32 Lords to the former to create the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Royal and Parliamentary Titles Act 1927 formally amended the name to the "**Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**", 5 years after the secession of the **Irish Free State**.

THE UK PARLIAMENT AND ITS INSTITUTIONS HAVE SET THE PATTERNS FOR MANY DEMOCRACIES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, AND IT HAS BEEN CALLED "THE MOTHER OF PARLIAMENTS". HOWEVER, **JOHN BRIGHT** – WHO COINED THE EPITHET – USED IT WITH REFERENCE TO A COUNTRY (ENGLAND) RATHER THAN A PARLIAMENT.



IN THEORY, THE UK'S SUPREME LEGISLATIVE POWER IS VESTED IN THE **CROWN-IN-PARLIAMENT**. AS, HOWEVER, THE CROWN ACTS ON THE ADVICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE POWERS OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS HAVE BEEN CURTAILED, **DE FACTO** POWER IS VESTED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.



Summary history of terms of the Parliament of the United Kingdom

| Year | Term (years) | Act | Notes |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---|---|
| Pre-1694 | No fixed maximum | - | |
| 1694 | 3 (maximum) | Triennial Act 1694 | |
| 1707 | 3 (maximum) | ratification of the Acts of Union | formation of Parliament of Great Britain |
| 1715 | 7 (maximum) | Septennial Act 1715 | |
| 1801 | 7 (maximum) | Acts of Union 1800 | formation of Parliament of United Kingdom |
| 1911 | 5 (maximum) | Parliament Act 1911 | |
| Second World War | 10 | Various Acts of Parliament | |
| Post-WW2 | 5 (maximum) | - | Parliament term fixed at up to 5 years |
| 2011 | 5 | Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 | Parliament term fixed at 5 years |

Emblem

The quasi-official emblem of the Houses of Parliament is a crowned portcullis. The portcullis was originally the badge of various English noble families from the 14th century. It went on to be adopted by the kings of the **Tudor dynasty** in the 16th century, under whom the Palace of Westminster became the regular meeting place of Parliament. The crown was added to make the badge a specifically royal symbol.



THE PORTCULLIS PROBABLY FIRST CAME TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER THROUGH ITS USE AS DECORATION IN THE REBUILDING OF THE PALACE AFTER THE FIRE OF 1512. HOWEVER, AT THE TIME IT WAS ONLY ONE OF MANY SYMBOLS. THE WIDESPREAD USE OF THE PORTCULLIS THROUGHOUT THE PALACE DATES FROM THE 19TH CENTURY, WHEN CHARLES BARRY AND AUGUSTUS PUGIN USED IT EXTENSIVELY AS A DECORATIVE FEATURE IN THEIR DESIGNS FOR THE NEW PALACE BUILT FOLLOWING THE DISASTROUS 1834 FIRE.

The crowned portcullis came to be accepted during the 20th century as the emblem of both houses of parliament. This was simply a result of custom and usage rather than a specific decision. The emblem now appears on official stationery, publications and papers, and is stamped on various items in use in the Palace of Westminster, such as cutlery, silverware and china. Various shades of red and green are used for visual identification of the **House of Lords** and the **House of Commons**.



Literature:

1. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Parliament>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_the_United_Kingdom
3. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/system/>