



MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE  
OF COMMONS

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**THE UK PUBLIC ELECTS MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPS)  
TO REPRESENT THEIR INTERESTS AND CONCERNS IN THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS**





MPS SPLIT THEIR TIME BETWEEN WORKING IN PARLIAMENT ITSELF, WORKING IN THE CONSTITUENCY THAT ELECTED THEM AND WORKING FOR THEIR POLITICAL PARTY. WHEN PARLIAMENT IS SITTING (MEETING), MPS GENERALLY SPEND THEIR TIME WORKING IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. THIS CAN INCLUDE RAISING ISSUES AFFECTING THEIR CONSTITUENTS, ATTENDING DEBATES AND VOTING ON NEW LAWS.

**THE UK IS DIVIDED INTO 650 AREAS CALLED CONSTITUENCIES. DURING AN ELECTION EVERYONE ELIGIBLE TO CAST A VOTE IN A CONSTITUENCY SELECTS ONE CANDIDATE TO BE THEIR MP. THE CANDIDATE WHO GETS THE MOST VOTES BECOMES THE MP FOR THAT AREA UNTIL THE NEXT ELECTION**



AT A GENERAL ELECTION, ALL CONSTITUENCIES BECOME VACANT AND A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT IS ELECTED FOR EACH FROM A LIST OF CANDIDATES STANDING FOR ELECTION. GENERAL ELECTIONS HAPPEN EVERY FIVE YEARS.

IF AN MP DIES OR RETIRES, A BY-ELECTION IS HELD IN THAT CONSTITUENCY TO FIND A NEW MP FOR THAT AREA.



THE UK PARLIAMENT HAS MPS FROM AREAS ACROSS ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND. IN ADDITION, THERE IS A PARLIAMENT IN SCOTLAND, A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN WALES AND A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN NORTHERN IRELAND.





**Nearly all MPs represent political parties. The party with the most MPs after a general election normally forms the Government.**

The next largest party becomes the official Opposition. If an MP does not have a political party, they are known as an 'Independent'.

Members of the House of Lords are organised on a party basis in much the same way as the House of Commons but with important differences: Members of the Lords do not represent constituencies and many are not members of a political party.

Lords who do not support one of the three main parties are known as Crossbenchers or Independent Peers. There is also a small number who are not affiliated to any of the main groups.



## **HISTORY OF THE PARTY SYSTEM**

THE SYSTEM OF POLITICAL PARTIES, WHICH HAS EXISTED IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER SINCE AT LEAST THE 18TH CENTURY, IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE WORKING OF THE CONSTITUTION. SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR, ALL THE GOVERNMENTS IN THE UK HAVE BEEN FORMED BY EITHER THE LABOUR PARTY OR THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY



## WHERE DO MPS SIT IN THE COMMONS?



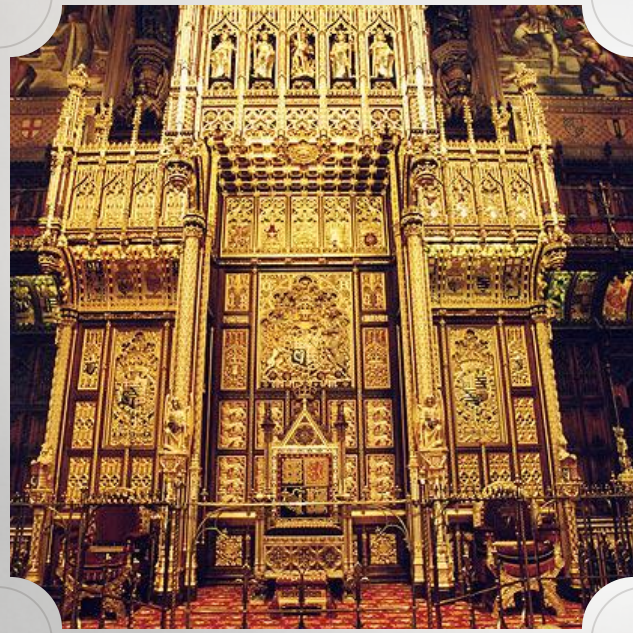
MPs from the same party tend to sit together in the House of Commons Chamber. The Chamber is a rectangular shape so the Government and the Opposition can face each other. The Government sits on the benches to the right of the Speaker. The official Opposition and MPs from other parties sit on the benches to the left of the Speaker

### *Frontbenchers and backbenchers*

In both the Commons and the Lords, Government ministers and Opposition shadow ministers sit on the front benches and are known as 'frontbenchers'.

MPs and Members of the Lords who do not hold ministerial positions sit towards the back of the Chamber and are known as 'backbenchers'.





Independent MPs and  
Crossbench and Independent  
Lords

MPs and Members of the  
Lords do not have to belong  
to a political party. Instead,  
MPs can sit as Independents  
and Lords can sit as  
Crossbenchers or  
Independents.