

Whigs and Tories

Parliament (from Old French: parlement; Latin: parliamentum) is the original legislative assembly of England, Scotland, or Ireland and successively of Great Britain and the United Kingdom. The British Parliament consists of the sovereign, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons.

Originally meaning a talk, the word was used in the 13th century to describe after-dinner discussions between monks in their cloisters.

In 1239 the English Benedictine monk Matthew Paris of the Abbey of St. Albans applied the term to a council meeting between prelates, earls, and barons, and it was also used in 1245 to refer to the meeting called by Pope Innocent IV in Lyon, France, which resulted in the excommunication and deposition of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II.

Modern parliaments trace their history to the 13th century, when the sheriffs of English counties sent knights to the king to provide advice on financial matters. Kings, however, generally desired the knights' assent to new taxation, not their advice.

Later in the 13th century, King Edward I (1272–1307) called joint meetings of two governmental institutions: the Magnum Concilium, or Great Council, comprising lay and ecclesiastical magnates, and the Curia Regis, or King's Court, a much smaller body of semiprofessional advisers.

The parliament called in 1295, known as the Model Parliament and widely regarded as the first representative parliament, included the lower clergy for the first time as well as two knights from each county, two burgesses from each borough, and two citizens from each city.

Early in the 14th century the practice developed of conducting debates between the lords spiritual and temporal in one chamber, or "house," and between the knights and burgesses in another.

Eventually, under King Henry VI (reigned 1422–61; 1470–71), the assent of both the House of Lords (a body based largely on heredity) and the House of Commons was also required.

Strictly speaking, there were, and still are, three houses: the king and his council, the lords spiritual and temporal, and the commons. (Britannica)

In January 1679 Charles II dissolved what was known as the Cavalier Parliament, which he had first summoned in May 1661, and summoned another one for May 1679. For the last years of the Cavalier Parliament a loose grouping of Members, known as the Country party, had opposed the Court's influence in Parliament, particularly its attempts to secure votes through bribes and patronage.

From 1679, in the wake of the Popish Plot allegations, a section of this opposition took on a more obviously religious dimension. Those who fought most vigorously against the Court's corruption and its foreign policy also strongly opposed the Church's persecution of Protestant Nonconformists and the possibility of the Catholic Duke of York's succession to the throne.

This group became known as the 'Whigs,' and they showed their flair for organization and propaganda through their overwhelming victories in the elections for the three 'Exclusion Parliaments' of 1679-81. In

reaction, a 'Tory' ideology had developed by 1681 which equally loudly supported the monarchy and the Church. (UK Parliament)

"Whig" and "Tory" are political party labels that have been in use in England since around 1681 - and their specific meaning has varied somewhat with changing historical circumstances.

In the late 17th century Toryism became identified with Anglicanism and the squirearchy (landowners collectively, especially when considered as a class having political or social influence) and Whiggism with the aristocratic, landowning families and the financial interests of the wealthy middle classes. (Britannica)

Thomas Babington Macaulay opined that the political labels "Whig" and "Tory" are "two nicknames which, though originally given in insult, were soon assumed with pride, which are still in daily use, which have spread as widely as the English race, and which will last as long as the English literature". (George Mason University)

As political labels, the terms derive from the factional conflict of the Exclusion Crisis (1679-81), Whigs being supporters of Exclusion (of the Catholic James, Duke of York, brother of the king and next in line for the English throne) and Tories being their Royalist opponents.

By extension, then, the Whigs were seen as asserting the primacy of Parliament over the monarch, while the Tories were seen as asserting the inverse.

This factional division of English political elites clearly echoed the divisions between Parliamentarians and Royalists in the era of the Civil Wars, and thus portended more than a simple difference of opinion on a particular (albeit rather important) policy matter.

Through the rest of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries, the terms "Whig" and "Tory" would continue to carry the weight of the Civil War conflicts even as the two factions came to be defined and redefined, first, in the Exclusion Crisis itself, then, in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1688.

Today, the business of Parliament continues to take place in two Houses: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Their work is similar: making laws (legislation), checking the work of the government (scrutiny), and debating current issues.

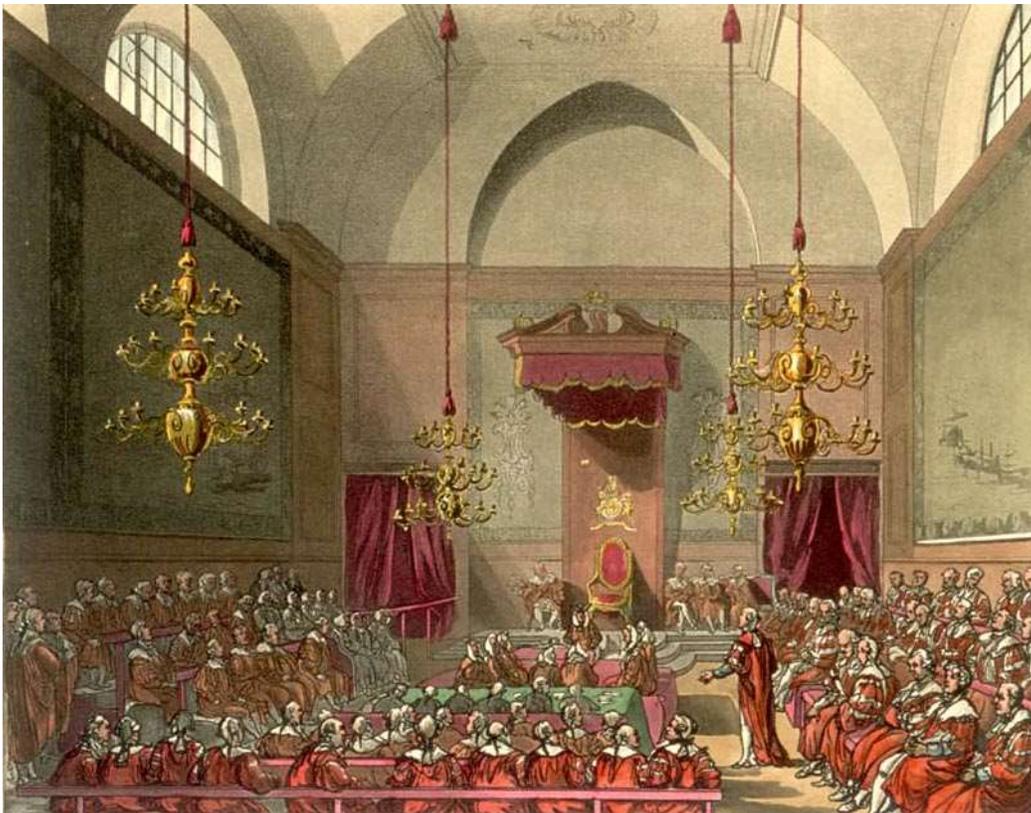
The UK public elects 650 Members of Parliament (MPs) to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons. The House of Lords plays a crucial role in examining bills, questioning government action and investigating public policy.

The House of Lords Act 1999 removed most hereditary peers (the five ranks, in descending order, are duke, marquess, earl (count), viscount and baron - someone who has become a member of the British House of Lords because their parent was a member) from the House of Lords.

Under the act, 90 hereditary peers retained their places, elected by their fellow party/group colleagues to remain as members. In addition to these 90 members, two peers (the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain) remain members of the Lords by virtue of the royal offices they hold. Since the start of the 2002-03 session, when one of the 90 hereditary peers dies, retires or is excluded, a replacement is chosen in a by-election.



House of Commons



House of Lords

British Parliament and the American Revolution

For much of the 17th century Parliament had little direct involvement in the growing colonies in America. Most had royal origins - through either chartered trading companies (such as the Virginia Company), royal grants to favorite individuals (William Penn's Pennsylvania) or direct royal control (Barbados).

Parliament's largely hands-off policy towards America later became known as salutary neglect. (UK Parliament) Due to debt from the French and Indian War Parliament started to tax the colonies by raising import duties on certain goods. The colonists continued to insist that they could not be taxed by the British Parliament without proper representation, even indirectly by customs duties.

Then on December 16, 1773 a group of protesters in Boston boarded a ship and dumped £10,000 worth of tea in the harbor, an event immortalized in the United States as the Boston Tea Party. In angry response, Parliament passed in 1774 a series of punitive measures, known in America as the Intolerable Acts, which closed Boston harbor and strengthened the power of the royal governor over the rebellious Massachusetts legislative assembly.

The crisis of 1774 soon tipped over into armed confrontation between British troops and American colonists at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts on 19 April 1775. Eventually it led to war, after representatives of the colonies meeting in the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia formally declared their independence from Britain on 4 July 1776.

Following a protracted war, Britain formally recognized the independence of the thirteen colonies as the United States of America in the treaty of 1783. The only parts of its former North American possessions which remained were the colonies of Nova Scotia, Quebec and Newfoundland – none of which had joined the rebellion and which had received many loyalists fleeing the war-torn colonies. (UK Parliament)

Whigs and Tories and the American Revolution

The early American activists referred to themselves as Patriots, or Whigs. Colonists who stayed loyal to King George III were known as Loyalists, or Tories. (LeeAnne Gellety)

Patriots, also known as Whigs, were the colonists who rebelled against British monarchical control. The Whigs did not believe that Parliament had the right to tax the American colonies.

Their rebellion was based on the social and political philosophy of republicanism, which rejected the ideas of a monarchy and aristocracy – essentially, inherited power. Instead, the philosophy favored liberty and unalienable individual rights as its core values.

Republicanism would form the intellectual basis of such core American documents as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

The majority of Patriots were found in the revolutionary hotbed town of Boston. There, prominent figures like Samuel Adams and groups such as the Sons of Liberty fanned the flames of revolution. (Smithsonian)

Loyalist (they were also known as King's Men, Tories and Royalists) were colonist loyal to Great Britain during the American Revolution. They considered themselves to be British citizens and therefore believed

revolution to be treason. Loyalists constituted about one-third of the population of the American colonies during that conflict.

They were not confined to any particular group or class, but their numbers were strongest among the following groups: officeholders and others who served the British crown and had a vested interest in upholding its authority.

In addition, the Tories included Anglican clergymen and their parishioners in the North, who had likewise taken vows of allegiance and obedience to the king; Quakers, members of German religious sects, and other conscientious pacifists; and large landholders, especially in the North, and wealthy merchant groups in the cities whose businesses and property were affected by the war.

The most common trait among all loyalists was an innate conservatism coupled with a deep devotion to the mother country and the crown. Loyalists were most numerous in the South, New York, and Pennsylvania, but they did not constitute a majority in any colony. New York was their stronghold and had more than any other colony. New England had fewer loyalists than any other section. (Britannica)

Information here is primarily from UK Parliament; George Mason University; LeeAnne Gellety; Smithsonian Museum of Art; Britannica

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young