



PARLIAMENTARY FACTS AND FIGURES

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Free votes in the House of Commons since 1997

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What is a free vote?

The majority of Government business in Parliament is whipped. The primary role of the Whips Office is to get the Government's business through Parliament and to secure the Government's majority in votes on its legislative and policy programme. A free vote in Parliament is one in which MPs or members of the Lords are not put under any pressure as to which way to vote by their Party's Whips.

Are free votes officially recorded?

No. There is no definitive list of free votes, and they are often held without any formal announcement. In response to a request in 2013 for a list of Government Bills subject to a free vote, the Leader of the House responded: "Whipping is a matter for individual parties and not a matter that the Government can comment on." [[HC Deb 15 Jan 2013 c685W](#)]

This list attempts to identify divisions in the House of Commons where all the main parties have allowed their MPs a free vote. Occasions, such as the vote on Heathrow expansion in June 2018, where individual parties have allowed their members a free vote are not recorded.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish definitively between whipped and genuinely free votes. The weekly whip sent to Members of Parliament is a confidential document and it is therefore not possible to identify whether every vote is whipped or not. However, Parties often let it be known when they are giving Members a free vote. Free votes reported in this note have been identified from ministerial comments or were reported as such in the media.

Feedback

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Free votes in the House of Commons since 1997

1997 Parliament	Session	Debate	Hansard	Division	Ayes	Noes
28/11/1997	1997-98	Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill [Second Reading]	301 c1199-271	Div 100	411	151
22/06/1998	1997-98	Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) [Report Stage] Reduction in age at which certain sexual acts are lawful	314 c754-811	Div 311	336	129
22/06/1998	1997-98	Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) [Report Stage] Reduction in age at which certain sexual acts are lawful	314 c754-811	Div 312	194	234
25/01/1999	1998-99	Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill [Second Reading]	324 c20-209	Div 46	313	130
28/01/2000	1999-2000	Medical Treatment (Prevention of Euthanasia) Bill [Second Reading]	343 c686-751	Div 54	113	2
10/02/2000	1999-2000	Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill [Second Reading]	344 c432-500	Div 71	263	102
28/02/2000	1999-2000	Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill [Third Reading]	345 c127-30	Div 90	317	117
14/04/2000	1999-2000	Medical Treatment (Prevention of Euthanasia) Bill [Report Stage] Consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Not decided in Affirmative; insufficient majority)	348 c603-66	Div 168	96	10
31/10/2000	1999-2000	Stem Cell Research [Motion to bring in a Bill]	355 c626-31	Div 315	83	175
19/12/2000	2000-01	Draft Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Research Purposes) Regulations [[Motion to approve]]	360 c211-66	Div 12	366	174
20/12/2000	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Second Reading]	360 c379-467	Div 28	373	158
17/01/2001	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Committee of Whole House] Hunting with dogs: supervision	361 c354-474	Div 60	155	399
17/01/2001	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Committee of Whole House] Hunting with dogs: regulation	361 c354-474	Div 61	182	382
17/01/2001	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Committee of Whole House] Hunting with dogs: prohibition	361 c354-474	Div 62	387	174
17/01/2001	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Committee of Whole House] Commencement	361 c354-474	Div 63	37	374
17/01/2001	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Committee of Whole House] Commencement	361 c354-474	Div 64	68	346
17/01/2001	2000-01	Hunting Bill [Committee of Whole House] Commencement	361 c354-474	Div 65	365	36
22/03/2001	2000-01	Election of a Speaker Motion that new Standing Order <i>Election of Speaker by secret ballot</i> be made	365 c498-541	Div 165	82	84

2001 Parliament	Session	Debate	Hansard	Division	Ayes	Noes
05/07/2001	2001-02	Members' Allowances, Insurance &c.	371 c421-77	Div 11	229	117
05/07/2001	2001-02	Members' Pay (Expression of Opinion)	371 c421-77	Div 12	66	260
05/07/2001	2001-02	Members' Pay (Expression of Opinion)	371 c421-77	Div 13	276	42
05/07/2001	2001-02	Parliamentary Pensions	371 c421-77	Div 14	215	172
05/07/2001	2001-02	Parliamentary Pensions	371 c421-77	Div 15	289	33
16/07/2001	2001-02	Foreign Affairs Committee Membership	372 c35-90	Div 26	232	301
16/07/2001	2001-02	Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee Membership	372 c35-90	Div 27	221	308
16/07/2001	2001-02	Treasury Committee Membership	372 c35-90	Div 28	52	351
19/07/2001	2001-02	International Development Committee Membership	372 c508-20	Div 37	304	55
18/03/2002	2001-02	Hunting with Dogs: Supervision	382 c52-139	Div 197	154	401
18/03/2002	2001-02	Hunting with Dogs: Hunting under Licence	382 c52-139	Div 198	169	371
18/03/2002	2001-02	Hunting with Dogs: Ban	382 c52-139	Div 199	386	175
14/05/2002	2001-02	Modernisation of the House of Commons [Motion to approve] First Report of Select Committee on Modernisation... relating to Select Committees	385 c648-730	Div 236	50	352
14/05/2002	2001-02	Select Committees Motion to create a Committee of Nomination	385 c648-730	Div 237	195	209
14/05/2002	2001-02	Payment for Chairmen	385 c648-730	Div 238	175	197
14/05/2002	2001-02	Payment for Chairmen	385 c648-730	Div 239	199	158
14/05/2002	2001-02	Liaison Committee: Power to take Evidence	385 c648-730	Div 240	78	261
29/10/2002	2001-02	Modernisation of the House of Commons [Motion to approve] Second Report of Select Committee on Modernisation Amendment negatived	391 c689-843	Div 332	150	394
29/10/2002	2001-02	Modernisation of the House of Commons [Motion to approve] Second Report of Select Committee on Modernisation Amendment negatived	391 c689-843	Div 333	94	441
29/10/2002	2001-02	Modernisation of the House of Commons [Motion to approve] Second Report of Select Committee on modernisation Main question agreed to	391 c689-843	Div 334	411	47
29/10/2002	2001-02	Parliamentary Questions	391 c689-843	Div 335	144	386
29/10/2002	2001-02	Parliamentary Questions	391 c689-843	Div 336	256	283
29/10/2002	2001-02	New provision for earlier sittings on Wednesdays, and for Thursdays and Fridays	391 c689-843	Div 337	265	288
29/10/2002	2001-02	New provision for earlier sittings on Wednesdays, and for Thursdays and Fridays	391 c689-843	Div 338	311	234
29/10/2002	2001-02	New Provision for Earlier Sittings on Tuesdays	391 c689-843	Div 339	274	267
29/10/2002	2001-02	Carry-over of Bills	391 c689-843	Div 340	365	147
29/10/2002	2001-02	Deferred Divisions	391 c689-843	Div 341	313	153
29/10/2002	2001-02	Programming	391 c689-843	Div 342	309	153
16/12/2002	2002-03	Hunting Bill [Second Reading]	396 c570-663	Div 25	371	155
16/12/2002	2002-03	Hunting Bill	396 c570-663	Div 26	164	365
16/12/2002	2002-03	Hunting Bill [Second Reading]	396 c570-663	Div 27	368	155
16/12/2002	2002-03	Hunting Bill Programme motion	396 c570-663	Div 28	331	165
16/12/2002	2002-03	Hunting Bill Money resolution	396 c570-663	Div 29	338	98
04/02/2003	2002-03	House of Lords Reform (No. 1) Option 1 (fully appointed)	399 c152-243	Div 75	172	390
04/02/2003	2002-03	House of Lords Reform (No. 1) Option 1 (fully appointed)	399 c152-243	Div 76	245	323

04/02/2003	2002-03	House of Lords Reform (No. 2) Option 2 (fully elected)	399 c152-243	Div 77	272	289
04/02/2003	2002-03	House of Lords Reform (No. 4)	399 c152-243	Div 78	281	284
04/02/2003	2002-03	House of Lords Reform (No. 6) Option 6 (60% elected/40% appointed)	399 c152-243	Div 79	253	316
10/03/2003	2002-03	Local Government Bill Repeal of section 2A of Local Government Act 1986	401 c40-129	Div 108	127	356
10/03/2003	2002-03	Local Government Bill Leave out Clause 119 (Repeal of prohibition on promotion of homosexuality)	401 c40-129	Div 109	77	368
09/07/2003	2002-03	Hunting Bill Compensation	408 c1281-341	Div 287	145	282
09/07/2003	2002-03	Hunting Bill [Third Reading]	408 c1281-341	Div 288	317	145
30/10/2003	2002-03	Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees	412 c448-507	Div 346	86	59
30/10/2003	2002-03	Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees	412 c448-507	Div 347	81	53
10/11/2003	2002-03	Water Bill (HL) Prohibition of artificial fluoridation of water supplies	413 c93-127	Div 357	181	284
10/11/2003	2002-03	Water Bill (HL) Fluoridation of water supplies	413 c127-31	Div 358	200	243

2005 Parliament Session		Debate	Hansard	Division	Ayes	Noes
22 April 2004	2003-04	Security Screen	420 c462-507	Div 138	120	66
22 April 2004	2003-04	Security Screen: amendment	420 c462-507	Div 139	92	99
22 April 2004	2003-04	Security Screen	420 c462-507	Div 140	112	76
12 May 2004	2003-04	Visitor Facilities	421 c447-9	Div 171	333	46
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Procedure	424 c1274-1326	Div 246	310	158
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Procedure: amendment	424 c1274-1326	Div 247	174	303
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Procedure: amendment	424 c1274-1326	Div 248	170	297
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Procedure	424 c1274-1326	Div 249	309	157
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill [Second Reading]	424 c1326-56	Div 250	356	166
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Commons suggested amendments Commencement: amendment	424 c1326-410	Div 251	342	15
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Commons suggested amendments Commencement	424 c1326-410	Div 253	329	8
15/09/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill [Third Reading]	424 c1411-22	Div 253	339	155
26/10/2004	2003-04	Programming of Bills	425 c1308-406	Div 278	191	265
26/10/2004	2003-04	Programming of Bills	425 c1308-406	Div 279	174	271
26/10/2004	2003-04	Programming of Bills	425 c1308-406	Div 280	182	257
26/10/2004	2003-04	Programming of Bills	425 c1308-406	Div 281	261	173
26/10/2004	2003-04	Deferred Divisions	425 c1308-406	Div 282	300	130
26/10/2004	2003-04	Carry-over of Bills	425 c1308-406	Div 283	296	137
26/10/2004	2003-04	Removal of References to Strangers	425 c1308-406	Div 284	242	167
03/11/2004	2003-04	Members' Allowances	426 c315-69	Div 307	239	109
03/11/2004	2003-04	Members' Allowances	426 c315-69	Div 308	118	193
18/11/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill Procedure	426 c1473-7	Div 337	271	136
18/11/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill [Lords amendments] Motion to disagree [Lords amendments]: amendment	426 c1478-508	Div 338	146	286

18/11/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill [Lords amendments] Motion to disagree [Lords amendments]	426 c1478-508	Div 339	46	345
18/11/2004	2003-04	Hunting Bill [Lords amendments] Motion to disagree [Lords amendments]: (further) amendment	426 c1478-508	Div 340	283	132
26/01/2005	2004-05	Sitting hours	430 c327-93	Div 47	292	225
26/01/2005	2004-05	Sitting hours: amendment	430 c327-93	Div 48	80	388
26/01/2005	2004-05	Connecting parliament with the public	430 c327-93	Div 49	375	14
26/01/2005	2004-05	Car mileage allowance	430 c327-93	Div 50	111	249
10/03/2005	2004-05	Support for Members who have chosen not to take their seats: amendment	431 c1704-60	Div 129	170	358
10/03/2005	2004-05	Support for Members who have chosen not to take their seats: amendment	431 c1704-60	Div 130	171	357
14/02/2006	2005-06	Health Bill [Report Stage] Smoke-free premises: exemptions	442 c1290-392	Div 163	453	125
14/02/2006	2005-06	Health Bill [Report Stage] Smoke-free premises: exemptions: amendment	442 c1290-392	Div 164	384	184
14/02/2006	2005-06	Health Bill [Report Stage] Smoke-free premises: exemptions: amendments	442 c1290-392	Div 165	413	129
14/03/2006	2005-06	Animal Welfare Bill [Report Stage] Docking of dogs' tails	443 c1330-1427	Div 187	476	63
14/03/2006	2005-06	Animal Welfare Bill [Report Stage] Docking of dogs' tails: amendment	443 c1330-1427	Div 188	267	278
01/11/2006	2005-06	Legislative process (notice for amendments in public bill committee)	451 c303-422	Div 334	223	172
01/11/2006	2005-06	Communications Allowance	451 c303-422	Div 335	290	199
01/11/2006	2005-06	September Sittings Amendment	451 c303-422	Div 336	122	354
01/11/2006	2005-06	Short speeches	451 c303-422	Div 337	365	62
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion to support principle of a bicameral Parliament	457 c1524-638	Div 65	416	163
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion that a reformed House of Lords should be fully appointed	457 c1524-638	Div 66	196	375
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion that a reformed House of Lords should be composed of 50% elected members and 50% appointed members	457 c1524-638	Div 67	155	418
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion that a reformed House of Lords should be composed of 60% elected members and 40% appointed members	457 c1524-638	Div 68	178	392
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion that a reformed House of Lords should be composed of 80% elected members and 20% appointed members	457 c1524-638	Div 69	305	267
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion that a reformed House of Lords should be fully elected	457 c1524-638	Div 70	337	224
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion concerning hereditary places: amendment	457 c1524-638	Div 71	241	329
07/03/2007	2006-07	House of Lords Reform Motion concerning hereditary places	457 c1524-638	Div 72	391	111
19/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Prohibitions in connection with genetic material not of human origin	476 c22-131	Div 191	176	336
19/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Prohibitions in connection with genetic material not of human origin	476 c22-131	Div 192	223	286

19/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Prohibitions in connection with genetic material not of human origin	476 c22-131	Div 193	181	314
19/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Activities that may be licensed	476 c22-131	Div 194	149	318
19/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Activities that may be licensed	476 c22-131	Div 195	163	342
19/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Activities that may be licensed	476 c22-131	Div 196	200	293
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Conditions of licences for treatment	476 c166-290	Div 197	217	292
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Conditions of licences for treatment	476 c166-290	Div 198	222	290
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage]	476 c166-290	Div 199	71	393
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage]	476 c166-290	Div 200	84	387
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage]	476 c166-290	Div 201	190	332
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage]	476 c166-290	Div 202	173	309
20/05/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Committee Stage] Foetal physical or mental abnormalities: information and counselling	476 c166-290	Div 203	233	304
22/10/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill Programme motion	481 c324-39	Div 283	322	157
22/10/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Report Stage] Prohibitions in connection with embryos	481 c339-408	Div 284	215	299
22/10/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Report Stage] Prohibitions in connection with embryos	481 c339-408	Div 285	206	298
22/10/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Report Stage] Prohibitions in connection with genetic material not of human origin	481 c339-408	Div 286	194	306
22/10/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Report Stage] Commencement	481 c339-408	Div 287	183	308
22/10/2008	2007-08	Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill [Third Reading]	481 c339-411	Div 288	355	129

2010 Parliament	Session	Debate		Division	Ayes	Noes
10/02/2011	2010-12	Voting by prisoners	523 c493-586	Div 199	234	22
05/02/2013	2012-13	Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill [Second Reading]	558 c125-235	Div 151	400	175
10/02/2014	2013-14	Children and Families Bill [Lords amendments] Children's health: offence of smoking in a private vehicle	575 c601-30	Div 207	376	107
10/02/2014	2013-14	Children and Families Bill [Lords amendments] Children's health: offence of smoking in a private vehicle	575 c601-34	Div 208	453	24
03/02/2015	2014-15	Draft Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Mitochondrial Donation) Regulations 2015 [Motion to approve]	592 c160-90	Div 147	382	128

23/02/2015	2014-15	Serious Crime Bill (HL) [Report Stage] Termination of pregnancy on grounds of sex of unborn child	593 c113-34	Div 157	201	292
23/02/2015	2014-15	Serious Crime Bill (HL) [Report Stage] Termination of pregnancy on grounds of sex of foetus (assessment of evidence)	593 c149-54	Div 161	491	2
11/03/2015	2014-15	Draft Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 [Motion to approve - deferred division]	594 c379-82	Div 174	367	113
26/03/2015	2014-15	Elections for positions in the House Motion concerning re-election of former Speaker and secret ballot	594 c1611-32	Div 188	202	228

2015 Parliament	Session	Debate	Hansard	Division	Ayes	Noes
11/09/2015	2015-16	Assisted dying (No.2) Bill [Second Reading]	599 c656-725	Div 69	118	330

2017 Parliament	Session	Debate	Hansard	Division	Ayes	Noes
31/01/2018	2017-19	Report of the Joint Committee on Restoration and Renewal [Motion to approve] Amendment C	635 c928	Div 111	47	410
31/01/2018		Report of the Joint Committee on Restoration and Renewal [Motion to approve] Amendment B	635 c932	Div 112	236	220
31/01/2018		Report of the Joint Committee on Restoration and Renewal [Motion to approve] Main Question	635 c878-939	Div 113	234	185

Sources:

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 Press reports

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