



BRIEFING PAPER

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Confidence Motions

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Summary

It is a core convention of the UK constitution that the Government must be able to command the confidence of the House of Commons.

The traditional position was that a Government that lost a confidence vote would resign in favour of an alternative administration, or the Prime Minister would request a dissolution from the Queen, triggering a general election. However, the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* removed the prerogative power to dissolve Parliament, giving a limited power to do so instead to the House of Commons. Under the Act there are two 'triggers' by which the Commons can bring about an early election: one is a simple vote carried by 2/3rds of its total membership; the other is via a motion of no confidence.

Under [section 2](#) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, if the House of Commons agrees a motion "That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government", a 14 calendar-day period follows. In that 14-day period a government may be confirmed in office, by a further resolution of the House, in the form "That this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government". If no such resolution is agreed, a general election is triggered.

The Act does not address the traditional means of expressing no confidence in the Government. The recent Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee report, [The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution – Interim Report the Status and Effect of Confidence Motions and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011](#), expressed the very firm view that the Act "has in no way affected the ability of the House to express no confidence in the Government through other means". However, as that report also said "only a no confidence motion as set out in the Act can bring about a general election".

Prior to the 2011 Act, a confidence defeat for a Government could lead to a request for a dissolution of Parliament, as an alternative to the resignation of the Government. The dissolution prerogative has been removed by that Act and hence requests for dissolution can no longer be made. Practice has been that a Government is only *obliged* to resign (or, prior to the 2011 Act, seek a dissolution) after being defeated on a confidence motion, although a significant defeat on any other motion *may* lead to a confidence motion.

Broadly speaking there are three main types of motion which act as tests of the House of Commons' confidence in the Government: 'confidence motions' initiated by the Government; 'no confidence motions' initiated by the Opposition; and other motions which, because of the particular circumstances, can be regarded as motions of censure or confidence.

Since 1895, governments have been defeated on questions of confidence on four occasions. The defeats on questions of confidence in 1895 and January 1924 led to the resignation of the Government and the defeats in October 1924 and 1979 were followed by requests for a dissolution. A list of confidence motions debated in the House of Commons, since 1945, is provided in the briefing paper.

On 15 January 2019, Jeremy Corbyn tabled a motion of no confidence in Her Majesty's Government, which the Government [defeated](#) on 16 January. This was the first such motion under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*.

1. The confidence relationship between Parliament and the Government

It is a core convention of the UK constitution that the Government must be able to command the confidence of the House of Commons. This convention governs both the appointment and resignation of Prime Ministers. As a recent Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) Report put it:

The fact that the government of the day must retain the confidence of the House of Commons is the constitutional principle which determines the relationship between Parliament and Government. The Government's authority to govern is dependent on maintaining the confidence of the House of Commons. This principle remains fundamental to our system of Parliamentary democracy.¹

The Committee echoed the *Cabinet Manual*, which states that

The ability of a government to command the confidence of the elected House of Commons is central to its authority to govern. It is tested by votes on motions of confidence, or no confidence.²

The traditional position was that a Government that lost a confidence vote would resign in favour of an alternative administration, or the Prime Minister would request a dissolution from the Queen, triggering a general election. However, the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* removed the prerogative power to dissolve Parliament, giving a limited power to do so instead to the House of Commons. Under the Act there are two 'triggers' by which the Commons can bring about an early election: one is a simple vote carried by 2/3rds of its total membership; the other is via a motion of no confidence.

¹ Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [*The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution – Interim Report the Status and Effect of Confidence Motions and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*](#), 11 December 2018, HC 1813 2017-19, para 8

² Cabinet Office, [*The Cabinet Manual: A guide to laws, conventions and rules on the operation of government*](#), October 2011, para 2.7

2. Confidence votes under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011

The rules concerning motions of confidence in the House of Commons and the obligation of a Government to resign upon losing such a motion have for a long time been governed by constitutional convention. Whether a vote on an issue was to be considered a matter of confidence was always signalled before the vote took place (see section 4). Before the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, a Government that lost a motion of confidence either resigned or sought a General Election. The option of responding to such a defeat by calling a General Election was also governed by a convention, which stated that the Queen would exercise her prerogative power to dissolve Parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister. Governments have lost votes of confidence on four occasions since 1895. In two cases, the Prime Minister resigned and the Leader of the Opposition formed a government;³ in the other two cases, the Prime Minister requested a dissolution and a general election followed the defeat on a confidence motion (see sections 4 and the Appendix).

However, the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* removed the prerogative of dissolution and hence the ability of a Prime Minister to call an early general election. It set the date of the next and subsequent general elections at five yearly intervals but provided for two 'triggers' for an early general election that can be 'pulled' by the House of Commons. The first is activated where a motion for an early general election is agreed either by at least two-thirds of the whole House (including vacant seats) or without division.

The second, 'no confidence', trigger is pulled if a motion of no confidence is passed and no alternative Government is confirmed by the Commons within 14 days by means of a positive motion of confidence.

Section 2 of the Act specifies the form of the motion:

"That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government."

If this motion is carried, there is a 14 calendar-day period in which a Government may be confirmed in office by a resolution in the form:

"That this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government."

If a new Government cannot be formed within this time period, then a general election is triggered. There is no provision for an extension of the 14-day period. Dissolution need not follow immediately on a triggering event, as section 2(7) allows for the Prime Minister to

³ However, in one case, the incoming Prime Minister requested, and was granted, a dissolution

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recommend a suitable polling day to the Crown.⁴ A proclamation for a new Parliament can then be issued.⁵

Overall, therefore the key effect of the 2011 Act in this area is as the PACAC recently put it: “only a no confidence motion as set out in the Act can bring about a general election”.⁶ As the Committee observed:

There is a general legal view that if a motion using other words to express no confidence, or a motion using the words from the Act, but with the addition of any other words, is passed, this would not engage the provisions of the Act and as such cannot bring about a general election.⁷

⁴ Under section 3 of the *fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, Parliament “dissolves at the beginning of the 25th day before the polling day”

⁵ For further information on the procedures for calling an early general election under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, see the House of Commons Library Standard Note, [Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011](#), SN/PC/6111

⁶ Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution – Interim Report the Status and Effect of Confidence Motions and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011](#), 11 December 2018, HC 1813 2017-19, p3

⁷ *Ibid*, para 19.

3. Confidence votes before / outside the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011

The Act does not address the traditional means of expressing no confidence in the Government. The recent PACAC Report noted that “some have expressed the view” that the mechanism in the Act for bringing about an early general election by means of a statutory no confidence motion “has superseded the pre-existing conventions around the confidence of the House in the Government”.⁸ In response, the Committee’s Report expressed the very firm view that the Act

has in no way affected the ability of the House to express no confidence in the Government through other means.⁹

In this regard it may be noted that the Act contains no provision regulating motions of confidence generally and that it says nothing about whether or when a Government should resign in response to such votes. PACAC observes that:

It is clear that the Act was not intended to supersede other means by which the House could express its confidence in the Government. The House is free to express its confidence in the Government, or not, in any manner it chooses.¹⁰

Indeed, in response to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee’s report on the *Fixed-term Parliaments Bill 2010-12*,¹¹ the Government said that:

The Bill is focussed on establishing fixed terms and the procedures for calling extraordinary elections. The aim of the Bill is not otherwise to interfere with the conventions which govern the position where the Government loses the confidence of the House. The Government considers that such matters are better left to convention.¹²

In *Public Law*, Mark Elliott and Robert Thomas wrote that “there is a long-standing convention that if the government loses a vote of confidence in the Commons, the Prime Minister should resign”. They continued by saying that “and a general election should be held”. They then noted that:

The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 has modified this position somewhat: an election is now triggered **only** if a new government capable of commanding the confidence of the House

⁸ Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution – Interim Report the Status and Effect of Confidence Motions and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011](#), 11 December 2018, HC 1813 2017-19, summary, p4, paras 44-46

⁹ *Ibid*, Summary, p3, Paras 57-60

¹⁰ *Ibid*, para 58.

¹¹ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Fixed-term Parliaments Bill](#), 10 September 2010, HC 436 2010-12

¹² [Government Response to the report of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill](#), Cm 7951, November 2010, para 56

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of commons cannot be formed within fourteen days of a vote of no confidence in the previous administration.¹³ [emphasis added]

Votes of confidence or no-confidence (also known as censure motions) are perhaps the most important Parliamentary procedural devices, as in the 'Westminster model' the fate of a Government is ultimately dependent on the support of a majority of MPs.

- In *Public Law*, Mark Elliott and Robert Thomas note that:
The government derives its authority, democratic legitimacy, and ability to govern from Parliament by virtue of its majority in the House of Commons.¹⁴
- In *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, the authors state that:
Within Parliament the House of Commons is the dominant House, as it is on the ability to command a majority in the Commons that a government depends for holding office.¹⁵
- In *British Government and the Constitution*, Colin Turpin and Adam Tomkins wrote that:
...the requirement that the government must retain the confidence of the House of Commons is still a fundamental principle of the Constitution. In the last resort it is sustained by the government's dependence on the House of Commons for 'supply' (finance) and the passing of legislation.¹⁶
- In *Our Republican Constitution*, Alan Tomkins wrote that:
At its [the British Constitution's] core lies a simple – and beautiful – rule. ... It is that the government of the day may continue in office for only as long as it continues to enjoy majority support in the House of Commons. The moment such support is withdrawn is the very moment that the government is required to resign.¹⁷

Obviously, confidence motions are particularly significant where a government defeat is possible (where there is a minority Government, one with a fragile majority, or where there is considerable internal party dissent). In these circumstances a Government may seek understandings (formally or otherwise) with other parties, groups or Members in an effort to secure victory, and thereby remain in office. The most recent example of their decisive impact was on 28 March 1979 when an Opposition motion of no confidence in the Callaghan (Labour) Government was carried with a majority of one; the result led to the dissolution of Parliament and the victory of the Conservative Party in the following general election.

Yet, despite their central importance, there is no certainty about the rules on the form and applicability of confidence motions in the UK Parliament (other than the specific motion triggering an early General Election under the 2011 Act), as these matters are established by

¹³ Mark Elliott and Robert Craig, *Public Law*, 3rd edition, 2017, p120

¹⁴ Mark Elliott and Robert Craig, *Public Law*, 3rd edition, 2017, p401

¹⁵ AW Bradley, KD Ewing and CJS Knight, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, Seventeenth Edition, 2018, p149

¹⁶ Turpin, C (2002) *British Government and the Constitution*, 5th Edition, p487

¹⁷ Adam Tomkins, *Our Republican Constitution*, 2005, p1

convention rather than by statute or standing order of the House. PACAC expresses its overall view on such motions as follows:

If the House of Commons resolves, by whatever means, that it has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government, this removes the incumbent administration's authority to govern. It is for Parliament, not the Government, to assert the terms under which this confidence (or lack thereof) is expressed. This can be through the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 statutory motion, or through a non-statutory motion of no confidence, or through a vote to which the matter of confidence has been clearly attached by the Government. Any expression of no confidence by the House in the government, removes the authority to govern.¹⁸

Not all motions are stated in the terms "That this House has (no) confidence in Her Majesty's Government"; some refer to (no) confidence in particular policies. Furthermore, any motion, however innocuous, can be made an issue of confidence by the Government. Equally as noted in Griffith and Ryle, "Many motions tabled on opposition days censure the government in highly critical terms, but do not count as censure motions".¹⁹ Although there is no generally accepted and comprehensive definition of a confidence motion, there are certain characteristics which may identify those which are not expressly declared to be such. These include timing, speakers and, most importantly, terms of the motion. The different forms of confidence motion are examined in section 4.

Prior to the 2011 Act, a confidence defeat for a Government could lead to a request for a dissolution of Parliament, as an alternative to the resignation of the Government. As noted above, the dissolution prerogative has been removed by that Act and hence requests for dissolution can no longer be made. Practice has been that a Government is only *obliged* to resign (or, prior to the 2011 Act, seek a dissolution) after being defeated on a confidence motion, although a significant defeat on any other motion *may* lead to a confidence motion.

The defeats on questions of confidence in 1895 and January 1924 led to the resignation of the Government and the defeats in October 1924 and 1979 were followed by requests for a dissolution. In 1993, John Major indicated that if he was defeated on a question of confidence, he would seek a dissolution:

We have before us a motion of confidence in the Government, with all the implications that flow from that... At the conclusion of this debate, either the Government will have won the vote of confidence and we can proceed with our policy... or we shall have lost and I shall seek a dissolution of Parliament... This House must decide today whether it is prepared to sustain the Government in office or encourage me to seek a dissolution.²⁰

¹⁸ Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [*The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution – Interim Report the Status and Effect of Confidence Motions and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*](#), 11 December 2018, HC 1813 2017-19, para 59

¹⁹ Blackburn, R and Kennon, A (2003) *Griffith & Ryle on Parliament*, p484

²⁰ HC Deb 23 July 1993 cc627, 633

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Rodney Brazier has effectively highlighted the fundamental constitutional importance of confidence motions:

The real significance of the general requirement that a government retain the confidence of the House of Commons is not in the rare loss of a vote of confidence or in the somewhat more frequent legislative defeat, but rather that it obliges every government to defend itself, explain its policies, and justify its actions, to its own back-benchers, to the opposition parties, and through them to the country as a whole.²¹

²¹ Brazier, R (1994) *Constitutional Practice*, 2nd ed. pp212-13

4. Forms of Confidence Motions

Broadly speaking there are three main types of motion which act as tests of the House of Commons' confidence in the Government: 'confidence motions' initiated by the Government; 'no confidence motions' initiated by the Opposition; and other motions which, because of the particular circumstances, can be regarded as motions of censure or confidence.

Whereas Government-initiated confidence motions have functioned as effectively dissolution threats,²² Opposition 'no confidence motions' represent the ultimate expression of the Westminster model of 'parliamentary opposition' or, as Punnett describes it, "office-seeking Opposition"²³ – the attempt by the Opposition to remove the present Government and, directly or otherwise, replace it by itself. Of course, while one would expect that a Government, save in the most extraordinary of circumstances, will resort to a test of Parliament's confidence only when it has the expectation of success, the majority of censure motions moved by an Opposition will be in circumstances when the parliamentary arithmetic can provide it with no real prospect of winning the vote.

There is no standard formulation for confidence motions, unless the person moving a no confidence motion wishes to engage the provisions of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*. There are, however, certain characteristics which are usually present and which may indicate that a motion is one of confidence:

(a) Timing:

A debate on a confidence motion will generally take precedence over the normal business for that day. Griffith and Ryle state that "By convention... if the official opposition tables a motion of censure on the government, the government provides time for it to be debated".²⁴ As such they may be contrasted with critical motions debated, for example, on Opposition Days or in Backbench Business debates. Parliament may even be recalled from a recess for such a debate to take place.

(b) Speakers:

A debate on a confidence motion will usually include speeches (normally the opening speeches) by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, rather than, say, the Government and Opposition frontbenchers with responsibility for the policy area which may be the subject of that particular motion. The list of confidence motions at the end of this Paper notes whether and where, in Commons confidence debates, the Prime Minister and/or the Leader of the Opposition spoke (excluding interventions) in each debate.

²² Philip Norton, "The Fixed-term Parliaments Act and Votes of Confidence", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 69, 2016, pp13-14

²³ Punnett, R M (1973) *Front-Bench Opposition*, p4

²⁴ Blackburn, R and Kennon, A (2003) *Griffith & Ryle on Parliament* p484; Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 24th edition, 2011, p344

(c) Terms of the motion:

A confidence motion will usually include terms such as 'confidence' or 'censure', and a substantive motion may refer, in critical or supportive terms, to an issue of current political importance or to one central to the Government's policy. However, apparently innocuous motions, such as the adjournment motions of 11 March 1976 and 20 July 1977, can also be issues of confidence.

Motions can be ones of 'confidence', that is, supportive of the Government, or of 'no-confidence'. The latter can be particularly difficult to distinguish from other forms of Opposition motion, many of which would normally be critical of the Government or its policies. No-confidence motions are often described as 'censure motions',²⁵ although 'censure motion' can also apply to a broader category of motion which may have some of the characteristics of a confidence motion described above, but which does not appear from all the circumstances to have the intention of bringing about directly, by its passing, the removal of the Government.

Sometimes the terms of a censure motion acknowledge this, as on 28 October 1981 where, after stating that "this House has no confidence in the economic policies of Her Majesty's Government" the motion concluded by calling upon the Government "to present to Parliament before the end of the year" new economic policies (emphasis added). This motion demonstrates the risks inherent in regarding all motions expressed in 'confidence' terms as being necessarily confidence motions.

This suggests that there are two forms of confidence motion. There is the clear, unambiguous confidence motion, which can be defined as a motion upon which the House of Commons, by its vote, knowingly and directly determines the continued existence of the Government. This includes bare motions of confidence or no-confidence in the Government itself (or, in many cases, in the policies of the Government), and any motion *whatever its terms*, where the House of Commons has been made aware that it is voting on the immediate fate of the Government. The second, broader category includes 'censure motions' as described above, as well as the perhaps rarer examples of motions supportive of the Government and its policies which betray similar characteristics.

Examples

The list at the end of this paper includes both the narrow and broader forms of confidence motion of the following type (full details of the motions cited are given in the Appendix):

(i) Motions of confidence put down by the Government:

A motion in the form 'That this House has confidence in Her Majesty's Government' (no direct examples since 1945, although the 14 December 1978 motion did express confidence plus a reference to

²⁵ see Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 22nd edition, 1997, pp280-81

policy), or in relation to a particular policy or issue (e.g. 24 September 1992, 23 July 1993);

(ii) Motions of no confidence put down by the Opposition:

A motion in the form 'That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government' (five examples since 1945: 9 June 1976, 23 March 1977, 28 March 1979, 22 November 1990 and 16 January 2019). Other motions essentially express the same sentiment but in different wording, sometimes with elaboration: 26 July 1962, 2 February 1965, 2 August 1965, 29 July 1980, 27 July 1981, 27 March 1991, or in relation to a particular policy or issue (e.g. 28 February 1980).

Note: the motion of no confidence on 16 January 2019 was the first such motion under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*.

(iii) Other motions put down by the Government or the Opposition treated by the Government (whether expressly declared as such or not) as, or because of the particular circumstances can be regarded as, motions of censure or confidence.

This category includes:

- substantive motions (e.g. 1 November 1956 and 5-6 December 1956 on Suez; February 1972, second reading of the *European Communities Bill 1971-72*);
- motions to reduce a minister's salary (e.g. 21 June 1895)
- technical motions such as Government motions to adjourn (e.g. 11 March 1976, where both the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister stated that the House's rules did not, in the circumstances, permit a substantive motion to be put down in time for a debate the day after the defeat giving rise to the motion).

In addition, both Government and Opposition may put amendments to such motions (see below), which may themselves be regarded as confidence motions according to the above criteria. Governments have amended Opposition motions on three occasions since 1945 – 1 November 1956, 2 February 1965 (censuring the *previous* Government), and 31 January 1985. Oppositions have sought to amend Government motions on 2 occasions - 5&6 November 1956, 24 September 1992 - as well as one occasion, 10 November 1964, by an amendment to the Loyal Address.

Parliamentary proceedings

Erskine May describes the parliamentary treatment of censure motions:

From time to time the Opposition puts down a motion on the paper expressing lack of confidence in the Government or otherwise criticising its general conduct. By established convention the Government always accedes to the demand from the Leader of the Opposition to allot a day for the discussion of a motion tabled by the official Opposition which, in the Government's view, would have the effect of testing the confidence of the House. In allotting a day for this purpose the

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Government is entitled to have regard to the exigencies of its own business, but a reasonably early day is invariably found. This convention is founded on the recognised position of the Opposition as a potential government, which guarantees the legitimacy of such an interruption of the normal course of business. For its part, the Government has everything to gain by meeting such a direct challenge to its authority at the earliest possible moment.²⁶

It appears that the same applies to motions of no confidence under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*. While under Standing Order No 16, proceedings under an Act of Parliament are limited to 90 minutes,²⁷ the Leader of the House confirmed that a day would be allowed to debate the Opposition's motion of no confidence on 16 January 2019,²⁸ the day after the motion was tabled.

Confidence motions may be debated on any sitting day, although rarely on a Friday (traditionally a private Members' day). The list in the Appendix notes the day of each debate.

The fact that the Official Opposition has precedence over other opposition parties in censure debates is demonstrated by the fact that two SNP motions in the late 1970s, to reduce the Prime Minister's salary by half,²⁹ and a motion on 22 March condemning the Government's policy following the 1979 devolution referendum³⁰ were not treated as motions of censure presumably because they did not emanate from the Official Opposition. In the latter case the Official Opposition put down a no-confidence motion later that day, and this was debated on 28 March.

At the start of the 9 June 1976 debate, the Speaker emphasised the special position of the Official Opposition when refusing to call a Liberal amendment to the motion of no confidence:

I gave considerable and careful thought to this question, but I must tell the House that if the Government give time for the discussion of a motion of no confidence or censure put down by the official Opposition the Government themselves do not table an amendment to the motion, and any amendment tabled by any other party or group in the House is not called. I take it that the purpose of that convention is to allow an unimpeded and clear decision to be taken for and against the motion. Although it has weighed in my mind that in the present Parliament the number of smaller opposition parties is somewhat larger than it has been in other Parliaments for many years past, that does not affect the principle which I have stated. Therefore, I am unable to accept the amendment today.³¹

Despite the fact that in this statement the Speaker said that it was "a long-standing convention" that "the Government themselves do not

²⁶ Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 24th edition, 2011, p344

²⁷ On 19 April 2017, the debate on the motion under section 2(1) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* "That there shall be an early parliamentary general election" was limited to 90 minutes [[HC Deb 19 April 2017 cc681-712](#)]

²⁸ [HC Deb 15 January 2019 cc1131](#)

²⁹ HC Deb 4 July 1977 c890

³⁰ EDM 349, 1978-79, 22 March 1979

³¹ HC Deb 9 June 1976 c1445

table an amendment to the motion" in a debate on a censure motion on 31 January 1985 the Government did move an amendment.

5. Constitutional Practice Relating to Confidence Motion

As noted above, constitutional practice has required a Government to resign or seek a dissolution following a defeat in Parliament only when it is clearly on a confidence motion. A defeat on any other procedural or substantive motion *may* lead to a confidence motion being tabled by either the Government itself (e.g. 23 July 1993) to demonstrate the House's confidence in the Government notwithstanding the defeat, or by the Opposition seeking to prove that the defeat demonstrated the removal of the House's confidence in the Government.

Rodney Brazier has stated that "it used to be the case that a defeat on a major matter had the same effect as if an explicit vote of confidence had carried".³² However during the 1970s a development in constitutional practice took place. In March 1974, Harold Wilson made a statement to the House concerning how his new minority government would view defeats in divisions:

The Government intend to treat with suitable respect, but not with exaggerated respect, the results of any snap Division... In case of a Government defeat, either in such circumstances or in a more clear expression of opinion, the Government will consider their position and make a definitive statement after due consideration. But the Government will not be forced to go to the country except in a situation in which every hon. Member in the House was voting knowing the full consequences of his vote... What I am trying to say is that a snap division or even, perhaps in some cases, a more substantial one... would not necessarily mean, and would not, indeed, immediately mean, any fundamental decision about the future of the Government or about a Dissolution. I am saying that if there were to be anything put to the House which could have those consequences, every hon. Member would have it explained to him in the House by the Government before he voted.³³

During the short 1974 Parliament the Labour Government lost seventeen divisions, and between the second 1974 election and dissolution in 1979 it lost a further forty-two divisions and several major Bills. Even the Thatcher Government with its large majority was defeated at the Commons Second Reading of the *Shops Bill* in 1986;³⁴ none of these legislative defeats were treated as matters of confidence by Labour or Conservative governments. Given this narrower interpretation by recent governments of what constitutes a loss of confidence in them, Marshall commented that

In the 1960s and 1970s, governments seem to have been following a new rule, according to which only votes specifically

³² Brazier, R (1994) *Constitutional Practice*, 2nd ed. p209

³³ HC Deb 12 March 1974 cc70-72

³⁴ HC Deb 14 April 1986 c698

stated by the Government to be matters of confidence, or votes of no confidence by the Opposition are allowed to count.³⁵

It may be that this perceived constitutional development was simply a confirmation that what is involved is essentially a government's ability to carry on in office, and that that ultimately must depend on it maintaining the confidence of the House of Commons. A confidence motion is a device which directly tests that confidence. If the result demonstrated that the Government had lost the confidence of the House, and could not therefore continue to govern effectively, it had to resign or (prior to the 2011 Act) seek a dissolution of Parliament. It is not clear that any other parliamentary event *required* such an outcome; hence suggestions that various other important votes such as on the Queen's Speech or on the second reading of the Finance Bill, are tantamount to confidence motions remain speculative. The amendment to the King's Speech that was carried in 1924 expressed no confidence. Otherwise, there has been no case in the 20th or 21st centuries of a Government being defeated on either so we cannot know for sure how it, or the House would react to such a defeat. What remains clear is that the Government may choose to resign for other reasons, including one or more defeats on motions that are not in themselves confidence motions, or even where it still retains the numerical confidence of the House but has suffered a significant rebellion from within its own ranks (as in the May 1940 vote which led to Chamberlain's resignation).

It is the government that will make the initial determination of when and under what circumstances an issue of confidence arises, unless its opponents choose to put down a motion of no-confidence in unambiguous terms, which will remove all doubt. This is of particular importance during periods of minority government, and in the past Prime Ministers faced with this situation have indicated which issues they would regard as ones of confidence which would force Parliament to decide whether it wished the Government to remain in office. However, as noted above, PACAC has recently argued that "It is for Parliament, not the Government, to assert the terms under which this confidence (or lack thereof) is expressed".³⁶

In summary the precedents and conventions suggest that the confidence of Parliament in the Government of the day can be assumed to exist, even in periods of minority government, unless and until it is shown to be otherwise, and that can only be demonstrated *unambiguously* by means of a formal confidence vote. A Government is entitled to assume the confidence of Parliament even if it is faced with defeats or significant rebellions in the division lobbies. The Government may decide to put Parliament's confidence to the test by moving a motion of confidence or by expressly treating a motion put down by

³⁵ Marshall, G (1984) *Constitutional conventions*, pp55-56. See also the statement (and subsequent debate) by Balfour on 24 July 1905 following a Commons defeat inflicted on his Government, HC Deb 24 July 1905 cc49-124.

³⁶ Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [*The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution – Interim Report the Status and Effect of Confidence Motions and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*](#), 11 December 2018, HC 1813 2017-19, para 59

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itself or by others as a confidence motion, or it can refuse to do this and put the onus on its opponents to provoke such a test by moving a no-confidence motion.

6. A question of confidence in the Government, not the Prime Minister

A confidence motion, although obviously an important test of the authority of the Prime Minister, is normally seen as testing confidence in the Government as a whole and the consequence of a defeat could not simply involve the resignation of the Prime Minister alone. Before the vote of confidence in 1994, there was an attempt to decouple the issue of confidence in the Prime Minister from confidence in the Government as a whole but this was rejected by ministers.³⁷ The motion tabled by Jeremy Corbyn, in December 2018, expressing a lack of confidence in the Prime Minister, which was never debated, also suggests such attempts are unlikely to be successful.

On 17 December 2018, following the Prime Minister's statement on the European Council Meeting, Jeremy Corbyn tabled a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister:

That this House has no confidence in the Prime Minister due to her failure to allow the House of Commons to have a meaningful vote straight away on the withdrawal agreement and framework for the future relationship between the UK and the EU.³⁸

Mr Corbyn's motion did not use the form of words specified in the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* and hence did not engage that Act.

Although it expressed no confidence, it did so in the Prime Minister. The Government did not provide time for a debate, as it would do for a motion of no confidence in the Government. *Erskine May* says that motions critical of ministers "have not been treated as falling within" the "established convention" under which the Government provides time for a debate on motions expressing no confidence in the Government.

On 18 December 2018, Valerie Vaz raised a point of order on this issue and asked the Speaker "whether you have heard from the Government about whether they have agreed to find time for the no-confidence motion, and whether you heard before everyone else that the Government are not allowing a debate on the motion".

The Speaker replied:

I thank the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving me advance notice of her intended point of order. The short answer to her question is that I have had no such indication from the Government that they have any intention of acceding to the request for a debate on the motion, although I have no doubt that her plea has been heard on the Treasury Bench. For the avoidance of doubt and in the name of better public understanding of our procedures, I

³⁷ Peter Riddell, "Who makes the electoral rules?", *Times*, 21 November 1994; Philip Webster, "Right yields over Cabinet 'suicide pact'", *Times*, 25 November 1994

³⁸ House of Commons, [Order Paper](#), Remaining Orders, 18 December 2018; see also [HC Deb 17 December 2018 c568](#)

should make it clear that there is a strong convention that the Government provide time at an early opportunity for a no-confidence motion in Her Majesty's Government if tabled by the official Opposition. However—and this is important—no such convention applies in relation to this particular motion, which is not a conventional no-confidence motion. So that is where things stand at present and I do not think I can add anything further, but the hon. Lady has put her point on the record.³⁹

7. The result of Government defeat on a Confidence Motion: previous cases

As stated above, a Government that has been defeated on a confidence motion could either decide to resign or – prior to the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* – the Prime Minister could request the dissolution of Parliament.⁴⁰

Consequences of previous government defeats in confidence motions

(i) 21 June 1895

The Liberal Government, already suffering from internal dissension, was defeated on an Opposition motion to reduce the salary of the Secretary of State for War. The Cabinet had to decide whether the Government should resign or request a dissolution. B S Markesinis has described how the Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, when setting out these alternatives to the Queen, preferred resignation of the Government as:

they had had a very bad week with various defeats and very small majorities...[I]t would be very humiliating to go on with the certainty of being defeated sooner or later; and ... it was very bad for the country, as well as for our foreign relations, to have such a small majority.⁴¹

The Leader of the House, Harcourt, announced to the Commons on 24 June the Government's decision to resign. The incoming Conservative Government under Lord Salisbury obtained a dissolution on 8 July.

This is the last occasion on which (a) a government with a working majority has been defeated on a confidence motion, and (b) a government with a working majority has chosen to resign rather than seek a dissolution following a defeat on a confidence motion. When the House was told of the Government's resignation, Balfour, for the Opposition, said that "the proper and constitutional course for them to have adopted would have been to advise Her Majesty to dissolve Parliament".⁴²

(ii) 21 January 1924

Baldwin's minority Conservative Government, elected in December 1923, decided to meet the new Parliament rather than resign after the general election defeat. It was defeated on a Labour amendment to the Loyal Address expressing no confidence in the Government, and resigned the following day. MacDonald, as leader of the second largest

⁴⁰ The previous dissolution procedures are described in House of Commons Library Standard Note, [Dissolution of Parliament](#), SN/PC/5085

⁴¹ Markesinis, BS, *The theory and practice of dissolution of Parliament*, 1972, pp101-102

⁴² HC Deb 24 June 1895 c1748

party, formed a minority Labour Government. No dissolution was sought by either Prime Minister arising out of the confidence motion.⁴³

(iii) 8 October 1924

The minority Labour Government formed after the confidence vote of January 1924 was, by the autumn, under pressure from the Conservative and Liberal parties, especially on policy towards the Soviet Union. However the fate of the Government was determined over the question of its handling of 'the Campbell case', concerning the abandonment of a prosecution of a left-wing newspaper, the *Workers' Weekly*. The Conservative Opposition put down a censure motion, to which the Liberals added an amendment. The Cabinet resolved to treat both motions as matters of confidence, which, if carried against the Government, would lead to a request to the King for a dissolution. The Liberal amendment was carried, and MacDonald was granted a dissolution of Parliament the following day.⁴⁴

(iv) 28 March 1979

In the aftermath of the devolution referendums, a motion of no confidence was passed against Callaghan's minority Labour Government. The effect of the vote is described in the exchange between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition immediately following the result:

Mr James Callaghan: Mr Speaker, now that the House has declared itself, we shall take our case to the country. Tomorrow I shall propose to Her Majesty that Parliament be dissolved as soon as essential business can be cleared up, and then I shall announce as soon as may be - and that will be as soon as possible - the date of Dissolution, the date of the election and the date of meeting of the new Parliament.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher: As the Government no longer have authority to carry on business without the agreement of the Opposition, I make it quite clear that we shall facilitate any business which requires the agreement of the Opposition so that the Dissolution can take place at the very earliest opportunity and the uncertainty ended.⁴⁵

This is the most recent example of a government being defeated on a confidence motion, and follows the October 1924 precedent.

In 2009, Philip Cowley and Mark Stuart marked the thirtieth anniversary of the 1979 confidence motion with an article in *Total Politics*. As well as a brief history of the votes that have taken place, they commented on the wording and effect of confidence motions. They also considered defeats on government legislation, stating that "there is nothing about a defeat on a piece of government legislation that necessitates a government resignation or a general election".⁴⁶

⁴³ For a detailed analysis of the background to the confidence defeat see C Cook, *The age of alignment: electoral politics in Britain 1922-1929*, chap 11

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, chap 16

⁴⁵ HC Deb 28 March 1979 cc589-590

⁴⁶ Philip Cowley and Mark Stuart, "[The ring of no confidence](#)", *Total Politics*, 2009

Appendix - List of Confidence Motions

The following lists provide details of the four confidence defeats since 1895 discussed above, as well as details of confidence motions debated since 1945, extracted from Hansard, and secondary sources such as Butler & Butler *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, p201.

1. Government defeats on confidence motions since 1895

**21 June 1895
(Friday)**

That Item A be reduced by £100, in respect of the salary of the Secretary of State.

(Opposition motion carried 132-125)

[\[HC Deb 21 June 1895 vol 34 cc1673-1712\]](#)

Motion to reduce salary of Secretary of State for War; Leader of the House, Harcourt, announced Government's resignation 24 June, [cc1746-9](#).

**21 January 1924
(Monday)**

...but it is our duty respectfully to submit to Your Majesty that Your Majesty's present advisers have not the confidence of the House.

(Opposition amendment approved 328-256; amended motion carried 328-251)

[\[HC Deb 21 January 1924 vol 169 cc532-685\]](#)

Opposition amendment to Loyal Address; PM, Baldwin, announced the Government's resignation 22 January [cc703-7](#)

**8 October 1924
(Wednesday)**

That the conduct of His Majesty's Government in relation to the institution and subsequent withdrawal of criminal proceedings against the editor of the *'Workers' Weekly'* is deserving of the censure of this House.

(Opposition motion defeated 198-359)

...a Select Committee be appointed to investigate and report upon the circumstances leading up to the withdrawal of the proceedings recently instituted by the Director of Public Prosecutions against Mr Campbell.

(Further Opposition amendment from the Liberals approved 364-198; amended motion carried without a division)

[\[HC Deb 8 October 1924 vol 177 cc581-704\]](#)

'Campbell case', withdrawal by Government of sedition case against *Workers' Weekly*; Prime Minister MacDonald declared issue a matter of confidence, [c638](#). Dissolution 9 October.

**28 March 1979
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion carried 311-310)

[\[HC Deb 28 March 1979 vol 965 cc461-590\]](#)

aftermath of devolution referenda; Prime Minister Callaghan, immediately announced intention to seek dissolution the next day, [c589](#)

2. Confidence motions since 1945

This list contains information on the date(s) and day(s) of each debate; the terms of each motion and divisions thereon; the reason for the debate, if not clear from the terms of the motion(s); the Hansard references, and (for Commons debates) whether and where the Prime Minister ('PM') and/or the Leader of the Opposition ('LOpp') spoke.

**5 & 6 December 1945
(Wednesday/Thursday)**

That this House regrets that His Majesty's Government are neglecting their first duty, namely, to concentrate with full energy upon the most urgent and essential tasks of the re-conversion of our industries from war-time production to that of peace, the provisions of houses, the speedy release of men and women from the Forces to industry, and the drastic curtailment of our swollen national expenditure and deplores the pre-occupation of His Majesty's Ministers, impelled by Socialist theory, with the formulation of long-term schemes for nationalisation creating uncertainty over the whole field of industrial and economic activity, in direct opposition to the best interest of the nation, which demands food, work and homes.

(Opposition motion defeated 197-381)

[\[HC Deb 5 December 1945 vol 416 cc2334-2454, 6 December 1945 cc2530-2599, cc2599-2643\]](#)

following Leader of the House's refusal to allow a full debate on the statement of 19 November setting out the legislative programme for nationalisation.

LOpp, Churchill, opened 2nd day; PM, Attlee, responded.

**4 December 1952
(Thursday)**

That this House regrets that Her Majesty's Government is dealing with the Business of the House incompetently, unfairly and in defiance of the best principles of Parliamentary democracy and the national interest, and records the view that this is in part brought about by the efforts of Ministers to force through measures, unrelated to the needs of the nation, for which they have no adequate support in Parliament or the country.

(Opposition motion defeated 280-304)

[\[HC Deb 4 December 1952 vol 508 cc1783-1892\]](#)

following the interruption of the debate on the Second Reading of the Iron and Steel Bill by an emergency debate on Kenya, and by the House being counted out on 21 November.

LOpp, Attlee, opened; PM, Churchill, responded.

**1 November 1956
(Thursday)**

That this House deplores the action of Her Majesty's Government in resorting to armed force against Egypt in clear violation of the United Nations Charter, thereby affronting the convictions of a large section of the British people, dividing the Commonwealth, straining the Atlantic Alliance, and gravely damaging the foundations of international order.

(Opposition motion defeated 255-324)

...approves of the prompt action taken by Her Majesty's Government designed to bring hostilities between Israel and Egypt to an end and to safeguard vital international and national interests, and pledges its full support for all steps necessary to secure these ends.

(Government amendment approved 323-255; amended motion carried 320-253)

[\[HC Deb 1 November 1956 vol 558 cc1631-1744\]](#)

PM, Eden, responded to opening speech. LOpp, Gaitskell, did not speak.

**5 & 6 December 1956
(Wednesday/Thursday)**

That this House supports the policy of Her Majesty's Government as outlined by the Foreign Secretary of 3rd December, which has prevented hostilities in the Middle East from spreading, has resulted in a United Nations Force being introduced into the area, and has created conditions under which progress can be made towards the peaceful settlement of outstanding issues.

(Government motion carried 312-260)

... recognising the disastrous consequences of Her Majesty's Government's policy in the Middle East, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to take all possible steps to restore Commonwealth unity, recreate confidence between our allies and ourselves and strengthen the authority of the United Nations as the only way to achieve a lasting settlement in the Middle East.

(Opposition amendment defeated 260-327)

[\[HC Deb 5 December 1956 vol 561 cc1254-1379, 6 December 1956 cc1453-1586\]](#)

Front-bench speakers referred to 'censure' and 'confidence' during debate.

LOpp, Gaitskell, wound up; PM, Eden, was ill.

**5 February 1962
(Monday)**

That this House deplores the attack made upon the United Nations by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in his speech at Berwick upon Tweed on 28 December 1961.

(Opposition motion defeated 228-326)

[\[HC Deb 5 February 1962 vol 653 cc32-172\]](#)

-regarded as censure motion by PM and Leader of Opposition.

LOpp, Gaitskell, opened; PM, Macmillan, responded.

**26 July 1962
(Thursday)**

That this House declares that Her Majesty's Government no longer enjoys the confidence of the country, and accordingly calls upon the Prime Minister to advise Her Majesty to dissolve Parliament so that a General Election can be held.

(Opposition motion defeated 253-351)

[\[HC Deb 26 July 1962 vol 663 cc1735-1868\]](#)

following the major Cabinet reshuffle, involving removal of seven Ministers, on 13 July.

LOpp, Gaitskell, opened; PM, Macmillan, responded.

**10 November 1964
(Tuesday)**

... but have no confidence that Your Majesty's Ministers can implement their proposals without damaging the programmes of modernisation already in train and thus imperilling the future well-being of Your People.

(Opposition amendment to Loyal Address defeated 294-315)

[\[HC Deb 10 November 1964 vol 701 cc846-973\]](#)

neither PM, Wilson, nor LOpp, Douglas-Home, spoke in the final day of debate, when motion was moved.

**2 February 1965
(Tuesday)**

That this House deplores the hasty and ill-considered actions of Her Majesty's Government during their first hundred days of office and has no confidence in their ability to conduct the nation's affairs.

(Opposition motion defeated 289-306)

....[deplores] the irresponsibility of the former administration leading to the serious situation which confronted Her Majesty's Government, and pledges its support for remedial measures to strengthen the country's economy and security and provide rising standards for the British people.

(Government amendment approved 306-289; amended motion carried without a division)

[\[HC Deb 2 February 19656 vol 705 cc897-1030\]](#)

LOpp, Douglas-Home, opened; PM, Wilson, responded.

**2 August 1965
(Monday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government and deplores the Prime Minister's conduct of the nation's affairs.

(Opposition motion defeated 290-303)

[\[HC Deb 2 August 1965 vol 717 cc1070-1201\]](#)

following the Chancellor's economic statement of 27 July.

LOpp, Heath, opened; PM, Wilson, wound up.

**26 & 27 July 1966
(Tuesday/Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in the competence of Her Majesty's Government to manage the economic affairs of the nation.

(Opposition motion defeated 246-325)

[\[HC Deb 26 July 1966 vol 732 cc1449-1580, 27 July 1966 cc1725-1857\]](#)

following the emergency economic measures of 20 July.

LOpp, Heath, opened; PM, Wilson, opened day 2.

**1 December 1966
(Thursday)**

That this House has no confidence in the economic policies of Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 246-329)

[\[HC Deb 1 December 1966 vol 737 cc642-768\]](#)

LOpp, Heath, opened; PM, Wilson, did not speak.

**24 July 1967
(Monday)**

That this House has no confidence in the economic policies of Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 240-333)

[\[HC Deb vol 751 cc68-195\]](#)

LOpp, Heath, wound up; PM, Wilson, did not speak.

**15-17 February 1972
(Tuesday/Wednesday/
Thursday)**

That the [European Communities] Bill be now read a second time.

(Government motion carried 309-301)

[\[HC Deb 15 February 1972 vol 831 cc264-376, 16 February 1972 cc443-552, 17 February 1972 cc 629-758\]](#)

Second reading of *European Communities Bill* 1971-72; expressly treated by PM, Heath, as issue of confidence (c752)

LOpp, Wilson, opened day 3; PM, Heath, wound up.

**6 March 1972
(Monday)**

That this House condemns the action of Her Majesty's Government in framing its European Communities Bill with the intention of removing the possibility of substantial amendment; and considers this to be a gross breach of faith in the light of undertakings previously given that the Bill and the Treaties could be fully discussed.

(Opposition motion defeated 270-317)

[\[HC Deb 6 March 1972 vol 832 cc1041-1170\]](#)

Neither PM, Heath, nor LOpp, Wilson, spoke.

**19 November 1973
(Monday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government's management of the economy.

(Opposition motion defeated 286-304)

[\[HC Deb 19 November 1973 vol 864 cc956-1092\]](#)

following the announcement of a state of emergency on 13 November.

LOpp, Wilson, opened; PM, Heath, responded.

**11 March 1976
(Thursday)**

That this House do now adjourn.

(Government motion voted down, i.e. Government victory, 280-297)

[\[HC Deb 11 March 1976 vol 907 cc634-758\]](#)

following the Government's defeat the previous day on its public expenditure White Paper. Expressly treated as confidence motion by Prime Minister Wilson, [c634](#).

PM, Wilson, opened; LOpp, Thatcher, responded.

**9 June 1976
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 290-309)

[\[HC Deb 9 June 1976 vol 912 cc1445-1566\]](#)

following the Chancellor's statement on 7 June announcing measures to stabilise the pound.

LOpp, Thatcher, opened; PM, Callaghan, responded.

**23 March 1977
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 298-322)

[\[HC Deb 23 March 1977 vol 928 cc1285-1418\]](#)

following the Government's defeat on its public expenditure plans (17 March) and the formation of the 'Lib-Lab pact'.

LOpp, Thatcher, opened; PM, Callaghan, responded.

**20 July 1977
(Wednesday)**

That this House do now adjourn.

(Government motion voted down, i.e. Government victory, 282-312)

[\[HC Deb 20 July 1977 vol 935 cc1606-1740\]](#)

following the Chancellor's statement on counter-inflation policy on 15 July. Referred to as confidence motion by Leader of the Opposition, Thatcher, [c1622](#) and [c1637](#), and by other frontbenchers.

PM, Callaghan, opened; LOpp, Thatcher, responded.

**14 December 1978
(Thursday)**

That this House expresses its confidence in Her Majesty's Government and in its determination to strengthen the national economy, control inflation, reduce unemployment and secure social justice.

(Government motion carried 300-290)

[\[HC Deb 14 December 1978 vol 960 cc920-1051\]](#)

following a defeat on 13 December on sanctions to enforce the Government's counter-inflation policy.

PM, Callaghan, opened; LOpp, Thatcher, responded.

**28 March 1979
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion carried 311-310: Government resigned)

[\[HC Deb 28 March 1979 vol 965 cc461-590\]](#)

following the result of the devolution referenda

LOpp, Thatcher, opened; PM, Callaghan, responded.

**28 February 1980
(Thursday)**

That this House has no confidence in the economic and industrial policies of Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 268-327)

[\[HC Deb 28 February 1980 vol 979 cc1580-1704\]](#)

LOpp, Callaghan, opened; PM, Thatcher, responded.

**29 July 1980
(Tuesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government, whose economic and social policies are spreading mass unemployment, undermining British industry and demoralising the country.

(Opposition motion defeated 274-333)

[\[HC Deb 29 July 1980 vol 9 cc820-911\]](#)

LOpp, Callaghan, opened; PM, Thatcher, responded.

**27 July 1981
(Monday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government, whose economic and social policies are

spreading mass unemployment, undermining British industry and demoralising the country.

(Opposition motion defeated 262-334)

[\[HC Deb 27 July 1981 vol 9 cc820-911\]](#)

LOpp, Foot, opened; PM, Thatcher, responded.

**28 October 1981
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in the economic policies of Her Majesty's Government which have pushed the registered total of unemployed people to shameful levels, have dealt a series of most damaging blows to British industry, and offer no hope of recovery; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to present to Parliament before the end of the year a range of fresh measures designed to reverse the present disastrous trends.

(Opposition motion defeated 210-312)

[HC Deb vol 10 cc872-964]

LOpp, Foot, opened; PM, Thatcher, responded.

**31 January 1985
(Thursday)**

That this House censures Her Majesty's Government for its gross mismanagement of the British economy which has led to the highest real interest rates, the worst manufacturing trade deficit and the highest level of unemployment in the history of Great Britain.

...supports Her Majesty's Government in its firm action to maintain the sound financial conditions and medium-term strategy which have brought about the lowest level of inflation since the 1960s, nearly four years of sustained economic growth, record output, sound exports, record investment and record living standards, and which provide the best long-term prospects for a fundamental improvement in the performance of the British economy and for the creation of new jobs.

(Government amendment approved 395-222; amended motion carried 392-221)

[\[HC Deb 31 January 1985 vol 72 cc418-510\]](#)

LOpp, Kinnock, opened; PM, Thatcher, responded.

**22 November 1990
(Thursday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 247-367)

[\[HC Deb 22 November 1990 vol 181 cc439-518\]](#)

following the Prime Minister's failure to secure re-election as Party Leader on the first ballot.

LOpp, Kinnock, opened; PM, Thatcher, responded.

**27 March 1991
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government in the light of its inability to rectify the damage done to the British people by the poll tax.

(Opposition motion defeated 238-358)

[\[HC Deb 27 March 1991 vol 188 cc962-1053\]](#)

LOpp, Kinnock, opened: PM, Major, responded.

**24 September 1992
(Thursday)**

That this House expresses its support for the economic policy of Her Majesty's Government.

(Government motion carried 322-296)

... condemns the total collapse of the Government's entire economic policy following their humiliating withdrawal of the pound from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism; deplores the Government's failed economic policies which have thrown the United Kingdom economy into a deep and damaging recession which has made it weak and vulnerable to speculative attack; believes that the Government's credibility and claims of economic competence are in tatters; demands the adoption of an economic policy which reduces unemployment and recognises that a strong economy can only be built by consistent investment in manufacturing industry and the infrastructure, by a sustained commitment to an expansion of training, the stimulation of innovation, technology, and regional development and by international co-operation for economic expansion; and firmly opposes cuts in public expenditure which will prolong the recession, increase unemployment, and weaken the United Kingdom's vital public services.

(Opposition motion defeated 288-330)

[\[HC Deb 24 September 1992 vol 212 cc2-116\]](#)

PM, Major, opened: LOpp, Smith, responded.

**23 July 1993
(Friday)**

That this House has confidence in the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the adoption of the Protocol on Social Policy.

(Government motion carried 339-299)

[\[HC Deb 23 July 1993 vol 229 cc625-724\]](#)

following the Government's defeat the previous day on the Maastricht Treaty Social Chapter. This is the only confidence debate on a Friday in the period since 1945.

PM, Major, opened; LOpp, Smith, responded.

**1 December 1993
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in the policies of Her Majesty's Government.

(Opposition motion defeated 95-282)

[\[HL Deb 1 December 1993 vol 550 cc544-554, cc571-635\]](#)

Note: The only modern example of a confidence motion in the House of Lords.

**28 November 1994
(Monday)**

That the [European Communities (Finance)] Bill now be read a second time.

(Government motion carried 329-44)

...this House believes that the European Communities (Finance) Bill is not an acceptable measure as it increases United Kingdom contributions to the European Union without action by Her Majesty's Government to cut fraud and waste in Europe or to reduce expenditure on the Common Agricultural Policy.

(Opposition amendment defeated 303-330)

[\[HC Deb 28 November 1994 vol 250 cc932-1034\]](#)

Prime Minister Major, made passage of Bill "in all its essentials" an issue of confidence, which may have made some or all of the 4 votes in Committee of the Whole House, and the third reading vote, all on 7 December, confidence occasions [HC Deb 7 December 1994 vol 251 cc 327-447 (see [c327](#))]. Note that the Opposition abstained, and the PM did not vote, on third reading.

Neither PM, Major, nor LOpp, Blair, spoke in the debate.

**16 January 2019
(Wednesday)**

That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government

(Opposition motion defeated 306-325)

[\[HC Deb 16 January 2019 cc1171-1273\]](#)

Following the Government's defeat the previous day on a vote to approve the EU Withdrawal Agreement and the framework for the future relationship.

LOpp, Corbyn, opened; PM, May, responded.

Note: the first time a motion of no confidence in the terms of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, section 2(3) and (4) was moved.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ [HC Deb 15 January 2019 c1131](#)

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