

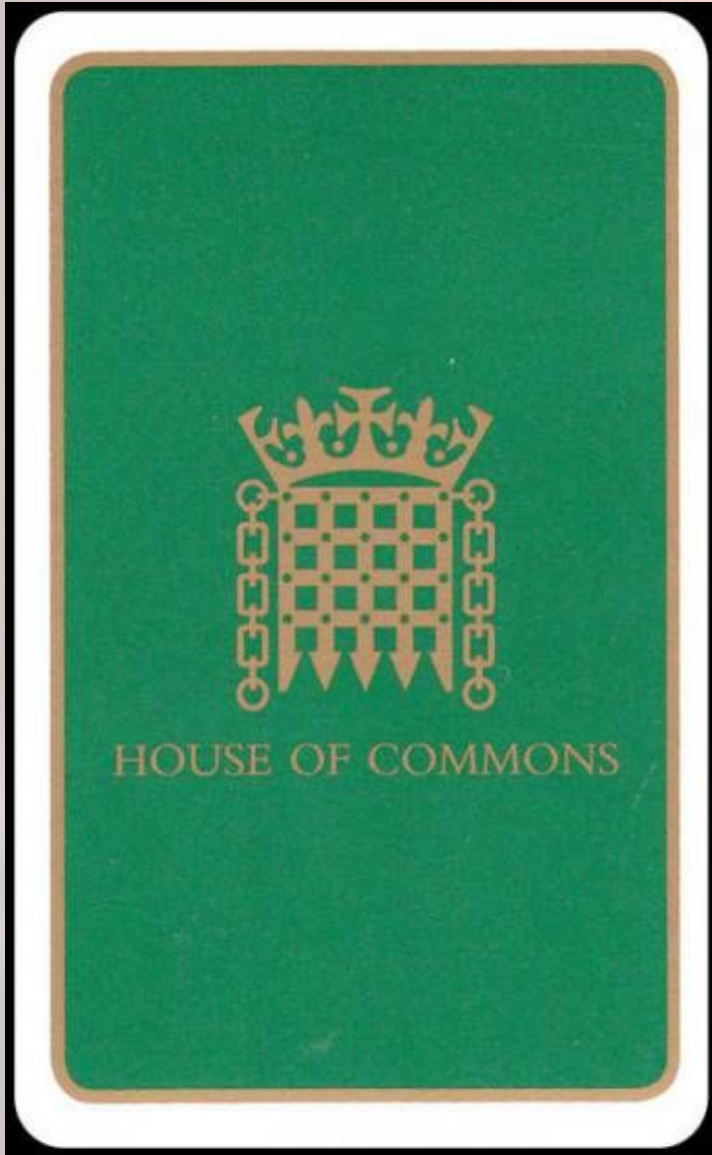
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# The British Parliament and the Electoral System

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The British Parliament consists of the House of Lords and the House of Commons and the Queen as its head.





The House of Commons plays the major role in law-making. It consists of Members of Parliament, each of whom represents an area in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. MPs are elected either at a general election, or at a by-election following the death or retirement of an MP.



Parliamentary elections must be held every five years, but the Prime Minister can decide on the exact date within those five years. The minimum voting age 18, and the voting is taken by secret ballot.



The election campaign lasts about three weeks. The election is decided on a simple majority- the candidate with most votes wins. An MP who wins by a small number of votes may have more votes against him than for him. Many people think that it is unfair because the wishes of those who voted for the unsuccessful candidates are not represented at all.





The British parliamentary system depends on political parties. The political parties choose candidates in elections. The party which wins the majority of seats forms the Government and its leader usually becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses about 20 MPs from his or her party to become the Cabinet of Ministers.



Each minister is responsible for a particular area of the government. The second largest party becomes the official opposition with its own leader and `Shadow cabinet`. Leader of the Opposition is a recognized post in the House of Commons.

