



## An assessment of Parliament



Function	Strengths	Weaknesses
Legitimation	Parliament is legally sovereign, so all laws that have been promulgated (i.e. passed in Parliament) have full legal authority.	It is understood that the sovereignty of Parliament is effectively the sovereignty of government, so the authority of Parliament is weakened.  The unelected Lords lacks legitimacy.
Scrutiny	Government is compelled to present all decisions and policies to Parliament.  Ministers and civil servants are required to appear in Parliament or before select committees.  Select committees do sometimes break free of party discipline and act independently.  When the government has a relatively small Commons majority, MPs and peers have a greater chance of forcing concessions over legislation from the executive, so scrutiny becomes more meaningful and effective.  Since the House of Lords was reformed and hereditary peers removed, it has grown in authority, and has become more professional. Thus, its scrutiny function has become more effective.	The culture of government secrecy conceals a considerable amount of information.  The convention of individual ministerial responsibility has become weakened. Collective responsibility means that individual ministers rarely speak their own mind, but merely reiterate official policy.  MPs lack research facilities.  Party loyalty sometimes prevents genuine criticism.
Representation	The Commons is geographically equally representative of all regions.  The Lords contains many peers who represent various groups and interests.	Parties do not represent voting strengths as a result of the electoral system.  Women and ethnic minorities are under-represented.  Party discipline inhibits MPs' independence.
Legislating	The Commons gives legitimacy to legislation.  The Lords is able to suggest useful amendments.	Because of party discipline, scrutiny of legislation is weak.  Passage of bills is guaranteed and ritualistic.  The more independent House of Lords lacks statutory power.
Redress of grievances	MPs often work hard to take up problems of constituents.	There is a lack of opportunities for back-bench MPs to raise their own issues in the Commons.
Deliberation	The Lords spends a good deal of time debating issues free from pressure of the whips.	The Commons is given little time for genuine debate.  Party loyalty makes it difficult for MPs to speak independently.