

## Sessions of Parliament: a quick guide

### What is a Parliamentary session?

A Parliament (the period between two general elections) is usually divided into several “sessions” of around a year. Within a typical election period of five years, this means there would likely be five sessions of Parliament. Erskine May [defines a Session](#) as a “period of time between the meeting of a Parliament, whether after a prorogation or a dissolution, and its prorogation”, simply meaning that a session lasts as long as Parliament is not [prorogued](#).

The official start of a new session is marked by the State Opening of Parliament and the King’s Speech, which sets out the government’s political aims and [legislative agenda](#) for the coming year.

A session ends either through prorogation, or the calling of a general election. The end of a session has important consequences for Parliamentary business, as no business can be conducted following a prorogation [in either Houses of Parliament](#) until the next King’s Speech has been delivered. All motions and written questions that are yet unanswered fall, and [all bills that have not yet reached Royal Assent will also fall](#), unless a carry-over order is agreed by the House to take them into the next session.

### What are the conventional timings for Parliamentary sessions?

A session begins at one of two possible moments: following a general election, or after prorogation. In recent years, State Openings that follow a period of prorogation have taken place in May or June, with Parliament prorogued for around a week beforehand.

While a session typically lasts around twelve months, the timings are not governed by law or other formal processes, and the length of a session may be extended at will, as seen in recent years. The [longest parliamentary session ever](#) in modern times covered the years of 2017 to 2019 as the government pushed through Brexit legislation. Boris Johnson extended his first session from December 2019 to May 2021 and Rishi Sunak [has announced his intention](#) to extend the current session from May 2022 to autumn 2023. A government might change the length of a session to align with their legislative agenda, for example to allow bills more time to pass, or to place pressure on members to ensure controversial business is pushed through before the session ends.

A session of Parliament is also obliged to come to an end when the term of Parliament is finished and a deadline for the next general election is reached (five years from the day it first met). The current Parliament will be [dissolved on 17 December 2024](#), unless an election is called before then.

### Are there any implications for Parliamentary business?

During the normal timeframe of a year-long session there are [13 allotted Fridays](#) for Private Member’s Bills (PMBs) to be read, and 20 days for Opposition day debates. In a longer session there are no rules governing how many more of these dedicated days can be granted; very occasionally, the usual channels have agreed a few extra days for PMBs, such as in the 2019-2021 session. Additional Opposition debates [can also be agreed by the Whips](#) if a session lasts for more than a year.

## Why has the current session been extended?

A longer Parliamentary session suits Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for several reasons. The political turmoil within the Conservative Party over the past twelve months – namely, the resignation of Boris Johnson and the brief premiership of Liz Truss – undoubtedly put pressure on the legislative agenda. By May, Sunak had only been in office for six months; more time affords him the opportunity to demonstrate his personal capability and define a legislative legacy for this period of his administration. One of the biggest challenges Sunak faces over the course of this year is [maintaining a degree of separation from his predecessors](#) while progressing with the same manifesto that the party was elected on in 2019. The Prime Minister may feel that more time is needed to assert his position before his own political agenda can be taken forward.

Poor polling, defeats in local elections, and a stronger performance from Labour mean the pressure is on Sunak to demonstrate his own political achievements, including progress with his [five priorities](#). With the clock ticking down to a general election, Sunak may also be scheduling Parliamentary time carefully to put his party in the best possible position in the year before the polls.

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