

# The Role of Parliaments in Times of Crisis: Front-line players, referees – or just noisy spectators?



Free webinar  
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## About the webinar

The global pandemic has had massively disruptive and worrying consequences for us all. It has impacted hugely upon the people and governments of nearly every country and region, worldwide. Moreover, in many countries the impact of COVID-19 has been compounded by and has sometimes exacerbated other, pre-existing, critical economic, social and political challenges – not least, in the United Kingdom, where the COVID-19 crisis has unfolded alongside the long-running saga of Brexit.

As democratically elected bodies exercising constitutionally designated law-making functions, national and sub-national parliaments are heavily involved in the political and legislative responses to such major crises. But, at the same time, the urgency of the need to find solutions may sometimes threaten to push parliaments aside: conventional legislative procedures may be short-circuited by executive decrees and by recourse to very extensive secondary legislation; normal mechanisms of parliamentary scrutiny of legislative and policy decisions can become casualties of the pressures for swift action.

There is often an already-existing imbalance of resources between the executive and parliaments, especially for policy development and analysis. Crises such as COVID-19 can worsen that imbalance, as relevant expertise is concentrated in and around the centre of government, with parliaments having to make do with crumbs from the scientific table.

Apart from the constitutional implications of major crises for the role of parliaments, the pandemic has sometimes posed particular logistical challenges to the ways in which parliamentary business is conducted. In the UK, for instance, 'social distancing' requirements have led to innovations such as online debates and committee hearings and remote voting.

This webinar will consider the constitutional and procedural impact on parliaments of major crises, using the UK's recent experiences both of the COVID-19 crisis and of Brexit for purposes of illustration. Participants will be invited to broaden the discussion by sharing their own national and local experiences. We will consider:

- The constitutional and representative role of parliaments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- The constitutional impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and Brexit on the role and status of UK parliaments
- Recent and continuing procedural developments in response to recent major crises – and their longer-term implications

## Webinar Speakers

Gavin Drewry is Emeritus Professor of Public Administration at the University of London and is Workshop Director for our annual scheduled Parliamentary Administration workshop. He is a specialist in public administration and public law, has published widely in the field and is an experienced tutor and presenter. He has

written extensively on public sector reform, on parliamentary select committees, on the legislative process and on public law. His most recent books, both co-authored, include: *The Judicial House of Lords 1876-2009* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and *Parliament and the Law* (Hart Publishing, 2013; 2nd edition forthcoming in 2018). He serves on the editorial boards of several international journals, including *Public Law* and *The International Review of Administrative Sciences*. Professor Drewry is a former Chair of the Study of Parliament Group and is an elected member of the Council of Administration of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences.

Dr Philip Aylett is a PAI Advisory Panel Member and is currently Clerk at the House of Commons Sub Committee on the Independent Commission on Aid Impact. Recently he has served as Clerk to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, and the European Scrutiny Committee. He was formerly Clerk of the Public Accounts Committee and Press Secretary and Policy Advisor to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the 'Nolan Committee') and previously chaired a standards (ethics) committee for Hertfordshire County Council. His PhD (University of London) was for a thesis on the modern history of House of Commons Select Committees. He is a regular contributor to PAI professional development workshops.

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## Who we are

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- Friendliness and focus on putting people first.

