

BBC News

Who is Commons Speaker John Bercow?

John Bercow - who has announced plans to stand down as Commons Speaker - has been a transformative but deeply polarising holder of the historic office.

The former Tory MP, best known for refereeing the weekly Prime Minister's Questions* with his shouts of "Order! Order!" has cast himself as the backbenchers** champion - upholding Parliament's reputation and giving MPs **unprecedented leeway to scrutinise** government and hold ministers to account.

But this has led to accusations of bias - particularly over Brexit - and of **creeping egomania**, along with suggestions he has **ignored or rewritten longstanding parliamentary conventions**.

During one of many recent controversies, a former minister said he was the "**last person left in Britain who is genuinely accountable to nobody**".

Commons tradition

Mr Bercow has said one of his key aims was to make the House of Commons look "**marginally less stuffy and forbidding**".

This has included allowing male MPs to speak in the chamber without wearing ties, and ending the requirement for Commons clerks - the advisers who sit in front of him - to wear **wigs**.

This didn't go down too well with some MPs, who said this could undermine Parliament's standing, and ignored tradition.

After becoming Speaker in 2009, he **updated his own attire** by wearing a business suit, rather than **the knee breeches and tights** worn by his predecessors.

Keeping order

In his decade in the Speaker's chair he has clashed with prime ministers, survived attempts to **oust** him, spoken out against the US president and played a key role as MPs have taken control of Parliament to try and stop a no-deal Brexit.

As Speaker, Mr Bercow is in charge of chairing debates and keeping order in the House of Commons. He regularly **bemoans the rowdy atmosphere** in the chamber, and isn't shy in interrupting people in full flow to tell MPs to calm down.

He has been praised for ensuring backbench MPs get a proper chance to question ministers - and has also had run-ins with several politicians, some of whom think he is **a little too fond of his own voice**.

Perhaps the most **notorious** dispute was with Conservative MP Sir Simon Burns, who in 2010 called him a "stupid, **sanctimonious dwarf**".

Mr Bercow also regularly interrupted former Prime Minister David Cameron and has turned on other ministers, including one who used his phone in the chamber.

In 2017, he sparked a debate by speaking out against US President Donald Trump being allowed to address Parliament, saying "opposition to racism and sexism" were "hugely important considerations".

This sparked a **backlash** from some Conservatives, who accused him of straying beyond his politically-neutral brief.

***Prime Minister's Questions** (often abbreviated to **PMQs** and officially known as **Questions to the Prime Minister**, while colloquially known as **Prime Minister's Question Time**) is a constitutional convention in the United Kingdom, currently held as a single session every Wednesday at noon when the House of Commons is sitting, during which the Prime Minister answers questions from Members of Parliament.

In Westminster parliamentary systems, a **backbencher is a member of parliament (MP) or a legislator who holds no governmental office and is not a frontbench spokesman in the Opposition, being instead simply a member of the "rank and file". The term dates from 1855. The term derives from the fact that they sit physically behind the frontbench in the House of Commons.

"I do think that Brexit is the biggest foreign policy _____ 1. of the post-war period. I think that we're in the world of power blocs and of trade blocs, and it makes more sense for the UK to be part of that power bloc called the European Union. If you add to that the _____ 2. effect of some of the social legislation that has been _____ 3. by the European Union, that seems to me to amount to a various combination of benefits for the UK. That's not to say the European Union is perfect - it isn't, it's a human-made institution, and to _____ 4. is human, and it's flawed, and it has weaknesses, and it has drawbacks and it's the source of frustration, but the advantages of the European Union membership very greatly _____ 5. the disadvantages, and, in my view, to walk away from that power bloc and that trade bloc is a mistake. I think that we will suffer in trade terms, and suffer in terms of _____ 6. and influence. And that seems to me to be so obvious that only an extraordinarily clever and sophisticated person could fail to _____ 7 the point. Should the UK not be _____ 8. by the 2016 referendum? My simple answer is: "No, it's not _____ 8. by the 2016 referendum." That is not to disrespect it, it's not to _____ 9. at it, it's not to say that it's of no account, but it isn't the final word on the subject. As others observed, I make the point that in 2016 people voted by a narrow _____ 10. for departure, but they didn't vote for a destination. And if you look at the words of campaigners for Brexit, very often they said different things at different times, and between them there was absolutely no agreement about what Brexit meant."