TheyWorkForYou’s voting summaries: 2024 revision

Alex Parsons
In one sentence

TheyWorkForYou’s voting record summaries are summaries of how individual MPs have voted to use the powers of Parliament, sensitive to the role of parties in driving voting decisions, that reflects ideas of the role of MPs held by UK citizens, and aimed at being an informational tool for the general public.

Our headline goals

- We want to present clear and accurate summaries of how individual MPs have voted for use by the public.
  - As a point of principle, it should be possible and straightforward to find out how MPs have acted on our behalf.
  - The simplest way the information is presented should be mostly right. We should provide options for users to learn or explore more, within the expectation that most won’t, and so the top-line summary matters.
  - While we aspire to produce information that is also of use to people with a professional interest in Parliament, this need might be met through other tools or summaries. For instance, while being able to compare different MPs is possible through voting records, it is not the purpose of these summaries.

- In line with our general approach, we want to align with and amplify citizen perspectives of how MPs should work, as demonstrated through citizens assemblies (in particular the Democracy in the UK Citizens Assembly) and polling.
  - The history to date of our voting records shows that making the actions of MPs more visible changes their behaviour.
  - We need to be conscious of the likely effects of our summaries, and ensure they reflect our values, democratic principles and approach. We want to anchor our approach in wider ideas of how our democracy works than our own opinions.
  - We also need to be aware of when pressure on individual MPs is not the best way to achieve systematic change and be aware of when our work reinforces rather than rectifies parliamentary systems that are hostile that are hostile to MPs from groups historically excluded from Parliament (e.g. women, ethnic minorities, disabled MPs).
The basics

As a third-party organisation, voting summaries are a way we can add value over existing data: Parliament makes voting information available, but the power of MPs within Parliament makes it difficult for Parliament as an institution to present this in ways that are clearest to the public. As a non-partisan third party, we are in a position to add context and create summaries that build on this public information, and make it more understandable to the general public.

TheyWorkForYou’s voting summaries are a collection of ‘policies’ that bring together the outcome of different votes into a single summary of how an MP has voted with the overall policy.

Groups of votes are assigned to ‘policies’, where it is assigned if voting ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a motion is in agreement with the policy. Votes can be assigned to multiple policies.

A vote can be a ‘scoring’ or ‘informative’ vote. Scoring votes are used to calculate the overall score for a policy, while informative votes are related to the policy, but are either tangential or not related to use of Parliament’s powers. These are listed in the more votes section, but are not used to calculate the score.

Voting summaries update process

TheyWorkForYou has been through a period where lack of funding means we have not consistently been able to update new policies as they emerge (but have been maintaining votes that fit into existing categories). We have completed a retrospective review in 2022-23 to fill in obvious gaps.

Our criteria for adding new policies were:

- Substantive votes (See below)
- Noteworthiness (in our own judgement)
- Cohesion (covered votes are mostly about the specific policy)
- Uniqueness (limited overlap between different policies)

Our new approach makes updates more practical with less resources. We anticipate that the 2024 update may need to be sped up due to an election. Ideally, we want to develop a different approach to displaying votes for an election, that is better reflective of change over the Parliament:

- All time voting records present an inconsistent picture across MPs with different tenures - with a lack of clarity on what we want users to take away from voting records.
- We want to anchor the votes displayed in terms of significance during the last Parliament, and want to explore different measures of judging significance, and anchoring this in usefulness to the public.
That many ‘policies’ can relate to the same vote challenges our current display which presents policies as independent. We need to consider ways of balancing the simplicity of this model, with presenting an accurate picture of the actual decisions MPs were making (again, the simplest takeaway should be mostly correct).

At election times, usage of TheyWorkForYou changes with much more traffic to the pages and records of party leaders. This suggests alternate party focused designs might be more useful to users in the run up to elections - and provide a good point to retrospectively ensure good coverage of the previous Parliament.

We will try and advance our approach for an election during the next year, but will fall back on ensuring voting records (in their current form) are up to date in the event of an early election.

Copy and design changes

Alongside the update to the data, we have updated our voting information page with new information about the data we publish. We have also re-arranged various pages and added new explanatory content:

- MP’s party comparison has moved from the overview page to the voting summary page (to be on the same page as everyone else).
- There is a new ‘introduction to your MP’ summary that helps signpost basic information and the resources we provide.
- There is a new introduction to voting summaries that explains what the summaries are, why we produce them, and linking into the new voting information page.
- Inside the ‘more votes’ page, we can now list ‘agreements’ as well as votes, and change our descriptions of major and minor votes to our new ‘scoring’ and ‘informative’ votes.
- The ‘more votes’ page will now also highlight when a particular vote is also used in other policies - with the goal of being clearer when policies are overlapping or conflicting. In practice, these pages are not clicked through often, but it’s useful for surfacing the overlaps.
- Vote descriptions created by the Parliament team (but which are not part of Hansard) are now used for post-2017 votes in preference to debate heading.

Replacing the Public Whip formula

TheyWorkForYou’s “policies” have historically been built on top of the Public Whip “Dream MP” system - where existing entries in the Public Whip were highlighted in TheyWorkForYou (with the addition of party comparisons), and where we have variously funded or directly added to the Public Whip to maintain the data in TheyWorkForYou.
In the “Dream MP” system, votes are associated with either being for or against a policy, and are given a ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ strength.

A formula is then used to calculate how much an individual MP differs from the “dream” score if an MP exactly agreed with the “dream MP”. This weights weak votes as being one-fifth the value of strong votes - and each has different rules on how they treat absences (explained below).

Part of our motivation to move away from the Public Whip as a source for our comparisons is wanting to control our version of this formula. Our replacement system (TheyWorkForYou Votes) makes it easier for us to adjust this formula at the source (and potentially apply different formulas to different kinds of policy), rather than calculating it several times in different systems.

Changes to absences are explained below, but our big change is to remove scoring for the ‘weak’ tier - so that only ‘strong’ votes contribute to scoring. These are relabeled in public facing areas as “informative” and “scoring” votes. Code for both approaches can be seen in this module.

The reason for this is simplifying the explanation of our process while having little impact on the overall result. Because weak votes are a lot weaker than strong votes, generally they make very little difference to specific MPs' scores. Some exceptions to this are discussed at the end of the document - but in general removing this tier, while still displaying the votes, helps manage a wider collection of votes that are adjacent, without getting into the maths of why some are worth one fifth as much.

While it is useful to be able to express a vote is slightly less important, but still relevant (and we may reintroduce a half-score in future) - this has complex interactions with how long an MP has been in Parliament. Because MPs have been in parliament for different amounts of time they will be scored on different parts of a policy depending which votes they could have voted on(requiring a comparison system that responds to that). This means that if a policy is “mostly” concentrated in one period, but has some weak votes in a later period, for long-serving MPs those weak votes will be correctly seen as a small part of their record, but for newer MPs, all their relevant votes may be weak votes, and so consequential on the public description. The new approach instead results in any description that an MP has not voted in any scoring votes - which more accurately signifies that the big votes in a policy were outside their tenure.

In general this is a blunter approach, but it gains in explainability, reduces complexity in edge cases, and in practice changes little in the headline summaries (which were already overwhelmingly driven by the strong votes).
Refocusing voting records around use of Parliamentary powers

We have made a policy change and now only use “action votes” rather than “talking votes” to contribute to the score for voting summaries. By this, we mean that the vote is an attempt to use the power of Parliament in some form to require something to happen (internally or externally), rather than being a statement that Parliament is agreeing with.

There are a few different reasons for this:

- We want to recognise and react to how Parliamentary behaviour changes to game TheyWorkForYou. We need to be aware how we are changing Parliamentary behaviour, and if this is in line with the impact we want to have.
- This approach is better aligned with our general case for holding MPs accountable for votes (see next section). If part of our view is that individual voting records are valid to highlight because they reflect impact and actions rather than the personal opinions of MPs, we can’t include votes that are mostly about expressing an opinion.

Votes in Parliament can be broken down into action and speech (roughly, more on fuzzy boundary later). Votes in Parliament can be thought of as a form of collective speech, where if more MPs agree than disagree, parliament itself “speaks”. Sometimes this is authorising the use of the powers of Parliament to make legislation, require documents to be released, or to set internal rules or scheduling. But in other times, votes are making a collective statement in favour of something, or asking the government to consider something, but without anything directly happening as a result. These are votes that, like MP speeches in debates, we want to make available through TheyWorkForYou - but do not want to especially highlight in voting summaries.

TheyWorkForYou has traditionally had all these kinds of votes in the voting record summaries, but including less actionable votes makes TheyWorkForYou more gameable. Amplifying these motions encourages oppositions to use their limited time to make statements, so that the government opposes and creates a division line that has political uses later. There is nothing wrong with this as a political tactic (parties should try to articulate and signal dividing lines), but given this motion doesn’t mean anything, the government can avoid participating at all, and in the last Parliament this became more obvious as a tactic. The opposition will “win” the motion, but without creating the wanted result the government voted against a motion. This shift was explicitly linked to use of TheyWorkForYou by a government MP.

A 2019 Parliamentary report was critical of the government for doing this because it disrespected Parliament and implied that the decisions of the House are meaningless. We could use this report as a justification to continue to include both kinds of vote. But the problem for Parliament is that
the government was right, and if Parliamentary motions can be ignored they are fairly meaningless. The less politically significant “winning” a parliamentary vote becomes, the less of a case there is for seeing these votes as worth highlighting. It sometimes benefits MPs to confuse speech and action, but we don’t want to accept this uncritically in how we run TheyWorkForYou.

In general, we want MPs to do meaningful things, and not do non-meaningful things. That is not always in their power, but we don’t want to reward non-meaningful things when we do not have to. For example, the 2022 opposition day motion that rapidly led to the end of the Truss government wasn’t an abstract “fracking is bad” statement, but an attempt to get Parliamentary time that could have led to concrete use of Parliamentary power. The opposition will rarely win at this kind of measure, but it is something that the government can’t ignore because it would have a substantive impact.

In line with the conclusions of the Citizens Assembly on Democracy in the UK¹, we are in favour of there being more Parliamentary time not controlled by the government that would give more potential for substantive processes to emerge from the opposition or backbenchers. The UK Parliament is unusual in the extent to which the government controls the schedule, and actively tries to restrict the “proper” uses of time that is given to other purposes. Our new approach is meant to discourage government and opposition playing games with non-binding motions and abstentions, and provides greater clarity on the content and impact of the votes we cover.

In practice, we will sometimes have to blur this line. Speech and action aren’t entirely separate spheres - and there are clear examples of votes that strictly cause nothing to happen in themselves, but are so politically significant they are practically significant. These votes may also be included based on our judgement. Votes on military action are the clearest example of a class of votes that should be seen as significant, but wouldn’t be on a pure reading of their effect. In principle, Parliament has no direct power to authorise or withhold authorisation for military action. In practice, governments tend to test support for action in Parliament in a way that makes these votes significant.

All votes reflect a disagreement among MPs and are in themselves a form of political speech, where MPs and parties are trying to signal their views and principles to their supporters, the general public, or the international community. Some of the most political consequential votes often have very little practical impact - but are eruptions of fault lines in the political system, and these eruptions can shape politics for years to come. But these kinds of indirect effects are hard to summarise - because their importance is often not what’s being talked about on paper. We want to explore alternate ways we can talk about these votes. Our long term approach would (funding

¹ Resolution 1 - We believe that parliament needs to be able to play a stronger role in scrutinising the actions of the government. Collectively, it represents the voice of the electorate as a whole, whereas not everyone voted for the government. - recommended that “MPs have more say over what parliament debates and votes on, with more time devoted to backbench concerns”
dependent) be creating different kinds of summaries to reflect different kinds of parliamentary dynamics.

**Balancing MP/party accountability in summaries**

TheyWorkForYou voting records assume that MPs are individually accountable for their votes, but provide context on how an individual MP is or is not in line with their party's general position.

A key part of the debate about TheyWorkForYou’s voting records is how reasonable it is to hold individual MPs responsible for their votes.

On paper, the power to vote is one that belongs to individual MPs. In practice, most votes in Parliament are cast under instructions from an MPs party (the 'whipping' system). As such, most votes do not represent individual decisions MPs have made.

Limiting voting records to actions rather than opinions makes it clearer why we are linking votes to individual MPs. A complaint made about voting records is they suggest MPs personally agree with what they are voting for. In substantive terms, this is a distinction without a difference - if MPs disagree with how they are voting, but do so anyway, from an *impact* point of view, it's not interesting information. By focusing on impact, we can be clearer about what our voting records represent and why these votes are being highlighted.

Our voting records work on the principle that MPs are accountable for their votes, regardless of if the decision is their personal choice. This reflects our polling that gave respondents this context, and asked if MPs were responsible for their vote even when instructed by the party, 55% of respondents agreed with this statement, and only 15% disagreed. Within this general direction to hold MPs responsible for how they vote, we need to be as clear as possible about the mix of party and individual action in how we present summaries.

Here we are navigating a clash between different theories of how UK democracy works. Technically speaking, the electorate elects a specific person to be an MP, and no one but the electorate can fire them. As such, you would imagine MPs are able to make independent decisions and should be held accountable for those decisions. But in practice this is not how our democracy works, MPs are generally elected because of their party and because of the promises their party made through the campaign and in manifestos. Because of this, parties can replace MPs at election time, and more generally have other carrots and sticks they can use to enforce discipline in smaller ways between elections.
Party discipline is not necessarily undemocratic. Where MPs are supposed to be reflecting wider party policy, as decided in an election, MPs taking their own approach undermines this. The Democracy in the UK Citizens Assembly found general support for parties enforcing discipline when it related to things parties had promised in manifestos. At the same time, this support for party discipline is not absolute - and outside manifestos the assembly felt that MPs should be returning to their constituencies to gather opinions and different MPs might end up in different directions.

In the end, both individual and collective responsibility arguments support making voting decisions prominent:

- If MPs are elected as individuals, and have agency on how they vote, it is reasonable to highlight how they have chosen to vote.
- If MPs are elected as members of a party, and follow the party line, it is reasonable for a summary of “the impact of your local MP” to reflect what the impact of electing a member of that party has been.

The UK system is somewhere in the middle of these two positions. We need to express both the capacity for individual action, while reflecting that most decisions are effectively made by the party leadership. We manage this with the information we have by:

- For all policies, calculating for comparable MPs (of the same party, who had the opportunity to vote in the same votes) how they voted, to highlight where an MP is acting as a typical member of their party.
- Where MPs are out of line with their party, we highlight this on the summary screen as decisions that make that MP stand out from other members of their party.

In general, rebellions are not in themselves good or bad. To amplify the nuanced opinion expressed by the Democracy in the UK Citizens Assembly, we would want to support them in some instances but not others. As part of our long term work, we would want to open up more information from parties on how they justify voting instructions, to make the dynamics of votes more clear to our users, while giving support to MPs to act in a way expected by the public, rather than the party leadership.
When MPs are absent for a vote

When an MP is absent from a vote, that vote is not taken into account in calculating their support for a policy. This is a policy change from our previous approach (which based on the Public Whip system, sometimes did and sometimes didn’t take an absence into account²).

MPs may be absent from a specific vote for many different reasons. Except where there is a narrow majority, or minority government, the outcome of a particular vote is generally predetermined by the government having more MPs than the opposition. As such, formal and informal mechanisms exist so that MPs can do other useful things with their time, while in practice the outcome is the same as if everyone was present.

MPs may also be absent for longer periods during parental leave or sickness. Greater availability of ‘proxy voting’, where an MPs vote can be cast by another MP, has reduced (if not entirely closed) the problem that the previous informal mechanisms created periods of absence in voting records.

But MPs may also be absent deliberately as a political decision. When party instructions are to attend and vote, not attending may be a lighter form of rebellion. In the absence of information about those party instructions (and allowed absences), we cannot determine the exact meaning of a particular absence.

There are two approaches we can take to this. We can treat absent votes as abstentions, or ignore them altogether. If in six votes, an MP only voted once and in favour with the policy, assuming each as an abstention (worth 5/10 points), the overall conclusion would be the MP was generally in the middle, with a light support of the policy. If absences are ignored, they would be seen as 100% in favour of that policy.

In moving away from the PublicWhip’s system, we have opted to go for the approach of ignoring absences in calculating the overall score (while presenting the lack of vote in the ‘more details’ section).

The main reason for doing this is the approach is simpler to explain in both process and outcomes.

Absence information is useful when understanding differences or clusters of MPs (as it may reflect what different MPs see as important), it doesn’t achieve our primary aim of explaining the impact of an individual MP, or their difference from their party.

² The Public Whip system (which TheyWorkForYou’s approach has been based on) uses two different ways of accounting for absences. One treats an absence as an abstention (worth 5/10 points for ‘agreeing’ with the policy in a vote), the other offers a lighter penalty of scoring an absence as 0/1 (where the total number of points being scored against only increases by one rather than 10). Each of these decisions on their own can be explained, but the aggregate approach is difficult to explain clearly.
The two approaches will lead to different scores in policies with more votes, and the most visible result of treating absences as abstentions will be a gap opening up between an MP and comparable MPs in their party (who may be voting the same when they vote, but attending more votes). Generally, in this situation an MP is more likely to be absent for other reasons, and in practice will agree with their party. This gap is more likely to be a result of how we have chosen to count than a real difference we want to make visible to users. In line with presenting the simplest and most accurate view in headline summaries, we should sand off the rough edges of the different things an absence can mean.

This approach is also useful in making inclusion decisions for votes with low participation, but that otherwise meet criteria. They can safely be included as signifying something about MPs in attendance, without adjusting the majority of MPs who did not attend to a more moderate position. This especially applies in the early stages of private members bills, where the process engages our criteria, but where relatively small numbers may support/oppose in early stages.

This approach is an editorial decision, rather than reflecting an uncontestable approach. We will need to be alert to if this changes MPs behaviour, and in general to campaign for changes that allow us to improve the clarity and accuracy of our summaries by providing more information, or allowing us to make clearer assumptions about what absences mean.

To this end, we want to make it easier for MPs to vote, so that it is easier for an MP to register whether they are aligned (or not) with their general party decision on their personal voting record. This includes both reform of the very slow way of voting and expansion of proxy vote or similar pre-registration approaches.

We also want publication of party voting instructions, so that “significant” absences could be more easily detected and shown to voters.

**Technical note:** Higher numbers of absent votes impose a cap on how extreme (close to 0 or 1) a score can be. More than 1 strong absence prevents a score of 95%+ and more than ⅓ of votes being absences prevents a score of 85%+. This is to avoid votes with reasonably high numbers of absences being given “consistently” or “almost always” text descriptions (as these imply low numbers of absences) - while preserving that a score is strongly directional rather than ambiguous.

**Decisions taken without a vote**

We have made a technical and policy change to include decisions taken without a vote (what we’re calling “agreements” as opposed to “divisions”) in scoring for policies. We are for the moment doing this cautiously rather than comprehensively.
The opposite problem of “not all votes are significant because they do not involve using the powers of Parliament” is that sometimes the powers of Parliament are used without a vote. When there is no (or little) opposition voiced to a motion, it can be passed without a division - and so without appearing on individual MPs voting records. This happens quite a lot, and huge amounts of secondary legislation (where ministers have been empowered to draft legislation) are approved without a vote.

Government MPs can be annoyed by TheyWorkForYou excluding these decisions because it means that voting records do not give them credit for taking popular action without opposition. Secondary legislation that created binding net zero targets for 2050 are the obvious example of this. No one was opposed, and so it happened, but without it appearing on the voting record of MPs in support. This means our voting records of “action” do not reflect all “actions” supported by MPs.

But the problem is an “agreement” exists only as a collective decision, and there is a clear difference between “no opposition” and “all MPs are individually in support”. There’s now retrospective arguments by some MPs that rather than representing a consensus, the net zero target decision wasn’t a meaningful democratic process. The lack of a vote allows multiple narratives, where different factions can argue different things about the levels of political support. This is not only hard to summarise, it creates general problems for accountability.

Decisions without a vote can also reflect the dynamic where the government should always win a vote, and so forcing a division to happen has little substantive effect on the outcome. In some cases, it will be politically useful to have that divide on the record, but in other cases the opposition may be opposed, but on balance, not want to spend time ineffectually opposing.

So the concern is if we started saying that all MPs (including all opposition MPs) were actually in favour of these votes - we would get a different group of MPs annoyed at TheyWorkForYou for saying they support something they don’t. This might also change Parliamentary behaviour, encouraging more divisions on secondary legislation, with wider implications for how Parliamentary time is managed.

This could be a good change - there is a general concern among Parliamentary experts that too much law is made with insufficient scrutiny through secondary legislation. According to the Institute for Government’s 2018 Parliamentary Monitor: “There were 840 pieces of secondary legislation laid before Parliament in the year following the 2017 Queen’s Speech; an average of five per sitting day” and only 260 of these required the affirmative procedure (roughly a third).

Most of these are discussed by Delegated Legislation Committees (DLCs), where “[a]n average, each piece of secondary legislation was considered for just 18 minutes.” Very few of these result in divisions:
Concerns about whether DLCs really conduct meaningful scrutiny are reinforced by the small proportion of committee debates that result in a division. Just seven of the 137 sittings of DLCs in the year following the Queen’s Speech (5%) ended in a division. The low number of divisions and brevity of DLC debates may be an indication that the secondary legislation laid by the Government was uncontroversial. But it also suggests that DLCs have become more of a formality than a serious source of parliamentary oversight of secondary legislation.

While secondary legislation subject to affirmative procedure in the Commons is usually automatically referred to a DLC, a small amount is instead debated on the floor of the House. Just three pieces of secondary legislation were dealt with in this way in the year following the 2017 Queen’s Speech – and none of these debates ended in a division. Rejection of secondary legislation subject to affirmative procedure is even more rare: the last time it occurred in the Commons was in July 1978.

Given that in the same period as there were 260 affirmative SIs there were 192 Commons divisions, reading all SI approvals as effectively unanimous votes would dramatically transform the Commons voting data. This might change public perceptions as well as the behaviour of MPs themselves.

The Democracy in the UK Citizens Assembly recommended that “Government should not be able to make significant legal changes - whether through primary or secondary legislation - without proper scrutiny”. But alongside that is not wanting to encourage purely performative as opposed to substantive changes in parliamentary scrutiny. We have a blunt tool, and to navigate this kind of change needs alignment of multiple approaches, inside and outside Parliament.

In general, our starting point should be accurately describing what is currently happening. “Agreements” are a large part of the current picture of how Parliamentary power works. We want to include decisions without a vote as a way power is exercised, while being accurate in what that reflects about individual MPs, and with an eye on making a point about the scale and lack of scrutiny of secondary legislation.

As such, we are starting cautiously. We have built technical approaches that let us include references to agreements in scoring and informative roles in a policy. We are applying this in a limited sense retrospectively, and will apply the same criteria used for vote inclusion to agreements moving forward - but may for the moment prefer not to include for borderline cases.

As of this update, agreements are only present in two policies: action on climate change, and approving recommendations of the standards committee (where several noteworthy suspensions have been made without a vote).
This is something we want to continue to think about and review. It interacts with complicated questions of how Parliament works, and how we can simply summarise what is happening. There aren’t easy answers, so we should expect our view to evolve over time.

What is the impact of these changes on existing policy coverage?

We’ve run an analysis of where the impacts of these changes will be visible, and where they affect specific policies or people more than others.

Most top-level summaries (73%) are completely unchanged by these changes. 82% of MP-Policy links are either the same, or have a stronger/weaker version of the same alignment (e.g. has not changed if the MP is for or against the policy). About 13% will no longer exist - with the remaining being previously middle-of-the-road assignments gaining a sign (or the reverse), and a small group (about 120 out of 80,000) where the direction of the MP-Policy link has changed.

This is good because we don’t generally want these to be too sensitive to the exact formula used - while this should matter at the margins, ultimately the kind of broad points we’re making should be reachable despite reasonable disagreements on methodology.

The most noticeable change will be a load of MPs no longer having relevant votes for a set of policies - either because we’re removing them as entirely non-scoring (e.g. made entirely of votes that are “saying something” rather than “doing something”), or where the effective range of a long-running policy has been trimmed - so MPs are no longer seen as voting on a policy where the substantial votes were before or after they were elected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MP-Policy Link change</strong></th>
<th><strong>Changes</strong></th>
<th><strong>%</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>64,107</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer relevant (absence/weak scoring change)</td>
<td>6,371</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer relevant (non-action vote downgrades)</td>
<td>5,379</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same direction (stronger)</td>
<td>5,925</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same direction (weaker)</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Was ambiguous (between 0.4 and 0.6) now has direction | 3,222 | 3%
---|---|---
Had direction, now ambiguous | 745 | 1%
Was for policy, now against | 107 | 0%
Was against policy, now for | 17 | 0%

Generally, these are good changes that narrow the focus and make the process more explainable - but also the huge amount of MP-policy links with no big change reflect the following about how this was already working:

- Weak votes were so weak they effectively had little impact in most cases - removed without much impact.
- Absences in the old system had a moderating effect on the overall score - removing this makes the results more extreme - with more MP-policy links moving towards extremes than the reverse.
- Most votes used to calculate policies were in some way "action" votes - with very few policies entirely made up of non-action votes, and many MP-Policy descriptions entirely unaffected by removing them all.

The goal of this process is to simplify how we work, and how we explain how we work - but from an end-product point of view, most things stay the same, and most things that change change in a small way. It’s a good progression and simplification rather than a revolution.

**Removed policies**

The seven policies removed (because they contained no action votes) were:

- Financial Support For 16-19 Year Olds In Education And Training
- Rail Fares
- Public Forests
- Jobs Guarantee For Young People
- Badger Cull
- Public Control Over Bus Services
- Bankers’ Bonus Tax
These remain available on The Public Whip if needed (and are still stored, but marked as retired, on our replacement twfy-votes platform). In principle, we might create ‘all non-action vote’ policies in future, where we feel we can clearly describe what is happening and it passes a notability test. For the moment, consistency is what we can say is in policies overall is more valuable.

The 124 links where the direction was reversed were mostly concentrated in two policies - ‘Labour’s anti-terrorism laws’ (48) and ‘pub leases’ (45). Another 14 were for ‘spending on welfare benefits’. ‘Pub leases’ is a candidate for future deprioritization based on remaining votes (still valid as is, but might not pass new inclusion tests). The effect on ‘Labour’s anti-terrorism laws’ is as a result of the changing of scoring to weak votes, as this policy has a lot of associated weak votes and is one of the few cases where this materially contributes to the overall score. As this is an older policy, and the meaning of strong/weak has drifted - this change is accepted for overall consistency. In general, we want to explore ways of presenting tighter time frames on voting records that let us worry less about policy changes that affect old policy assignments.

New policies

23 new policies have been introduced in this update.

These are not intended to be comprehensive for the current Parliament, and in part are trying to cover gaps left from the previous Parliament. These emerged from a process of organic grouping of new votes into potential policies, which were then evaluated against the new criteria (which had not been developed during the initial grouping) for inclusion priority.

Our intention with the new criteria in place is to improve how we prioritise policies for display, and proactively seek out noteworthy gaps in our model. We’ll do this through further development of draft policies that did not pass the initial cut-off, and developing new inputs to the top of the funnel to ensure good coverage.

These policies are:

- Standards for Imported Goods
- Powers of the Devolved Administration in Northern Ireland
- Voter Identification
- Approve reports of Standards Committee
- Preservation of Environmental Protections on Withdrawal from the European Union
- Biodiversity
- Air Quality
- Environmental Water Quality
- Referendum on EU Withdrawal Arrangements
- Action to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19
● Higher Taxes Specifically to Fund Health and Care
● Individual Contributions to Social Care Costs
● Access to Abortion
● Authorised Criminal Conduct by Undercover Sources
● Removal of Trespassers Intending to Reside on Land
● Deprivation of Citizenship
● Fire Safety
● Planning Law
● Landlords paying for costs of Building Safety Works
● Free Internal Market Within the United Kingdom
● Heathrow Airport Expansion
● Increase the State Pension Age for Women More Slowly
● State Pension Age