

BRIEFING

INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS: WHAT IS PARLIAMENT'S ROLE, AND WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

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Treaties and other international agreements can be wide-ranging and complex. They concern everything from trade to security, and have a significant effect on citizens' day-to-day lives.

But the mechanisms for parliamentary involvement in scrutinising and approving these important agreements are widely considered inadequate. Various proposals have now been made to reform the system, and to give parliament a more substantial role.

International treaties and other agreements are vital policy tools in a world where many problems and solutions cross borders. But the UK parliament has limited involvement in them, which is increasingly considered inadequate. Parliamentary committees such as the Commons [Public Administration and Const](#)

International agreements once largely concerned tariffs and war. But as the world's challenges and opportunities have become increasingly interconnected, these agreements have become far more wide-reaching and now have a major impact on daily life. For example, trade agreements may affect food standards, healthcare provision

power as the Commons – instead, the government simply has to lay a statement setting out its position and can then ratify regardless.

CRAG has recently been supplemented by some [non-binding government commitments](#) on free trade agreements, for example on making time for debates on negotiating objectives or signed agreements. However, the informality of these commitments leaves their status in doubt.

CRAG has [widely been called](#) unfit for purpose, both because its scope is relatively narrow, and because the powers it contains are relatively weak. Notably, CRAG applies only to treaties which require ratification. This means that some types of treaties – a

