



BRIEFING PAPER

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Membership of UK Political Parties

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2. Trends in UK party membership
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Summary

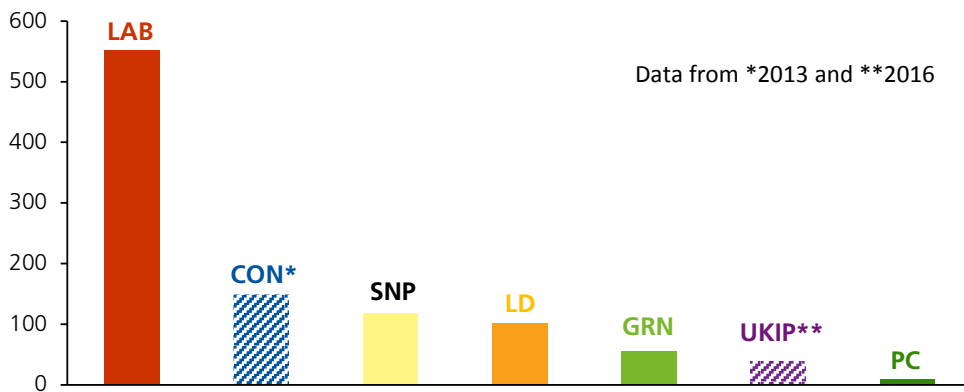
The latest available estimates from political parties' head offices, press releases and media estimates show that:

- The **Labour Party** has around 552,000 members, as of June 2017¹
- The **Conservative Party** had 149,800 members as of December 2013, the latest available estimate published by CCHQ²
- The **Scottish National Party** has around 118,000 members, as of August 2017³
- The **Liberal Democrat Party** has around 102,000 members, as of May 2017⁴
- The **Green Party** (England and Wales) has 55,500 members, as of March 2017⁵
- **UKIP** had around 39,000 members, as of July 2016⁶
- **Plaid Cymru** has around 8,300 members, as of 2017⁷

Membership of UK political parties

Latest available data (as of August 2017)

Thousands



Source: Latest available figures provided by party head offices and media releases

Notes: Conservative figures are as of December 2013 (Latest available estimates); Labour figures are as of [June 2017](#); Lib Dem figures are as of [May 2017](#); UKIP figure is as of July 2016 (Latest available)

Membership of the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrat Parties has increased to around 1.7% of the electorate in 2017, compared to a historic low of 0.8% in 2013. Across the UK, Labour Party membership increased from 0.6% in 2013 to 1.2% in 2017.

Membership of "other" parties has changed markedly in recent years. In August 2017 SNP membership was around 118,000, compared to 25,000 in December 2013; across Scotland, assuming all Scottish National Party members are in Scotland, SNP membership increased

Calculation of Party membership as proportion of electorate is based on assumption that latest party membership figures are accurate and that the Conservative party membership remained at 2013 level (latest data)

¹ May Bulman, [Labour Party membership soars by 35,000 since general election](#), The Independent, 13 June 2017.

² Wallace, Mark, [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 --- up 11.7 per cent](#), Conservative Home, 28 September 2014 (Latest publically available estimate)

³ Information provided by Scottish National Party Headquarters

⁴ Membership figure reported to be higher than 101,768. Michael Wilkinson, [Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections](#), Liberal Democrats, 3 May 2017

⁵ BBC news, [Guide to the parties: Green Party](#), 18 May 2017

⁶ Information from UKIP head office as at July 2016

⁷ Express, [Plaid Cymru Party Profile](#), 2017 (reported figure 8,273 as at 2017)

from 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 to 3.0% in 2017. In March 2017 Green Party (England and Wales) membership was around 55,000, compared to 13,800 in December 2013. There is no available data on UKIP's membership in 2017. Based on latest data, the Party's membership increased from 32,000 in December 2013 to around 47,000 in May 2015, though has since fallen to 39,000 in July 2016.

Academic surveys suggest that in 2015, more than half of Green, Labour and the Conservative party members were graduates, compared to just under a quarter of UKIP members. The highest rates of upper class members was recorded among the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, the lowest among UKIP and SNP members.

Data published in annual accounts

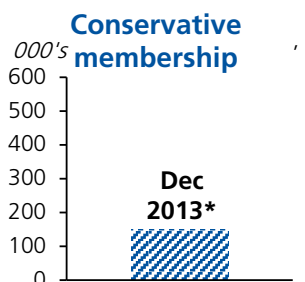
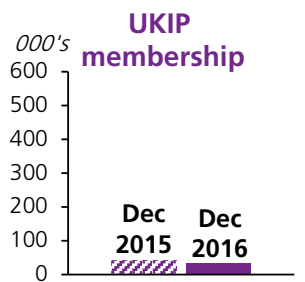
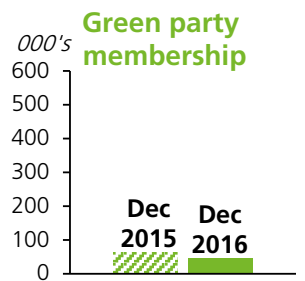
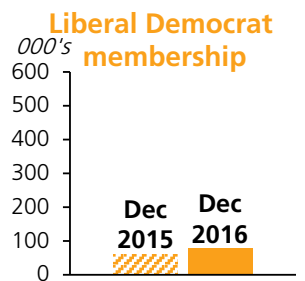
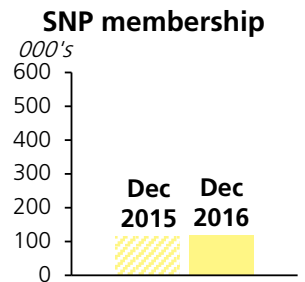
Political parties are under no legal obligation to publish membership statistics. Many parties provide party membership figures for the year ending 31 December in annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission. The latest estimates released by the Electoral Commission shows that on 31 December 2016:

- The **Labour Party** had around 544,000 members, an increase from 388,000 in December 2015
- The **Scottish National Party** had around 119,000 members, an increase from 115,000 in December 2015
- The **Liberal Democrat Party** had around 78,000 members, a rise from 61,000 in December 2015
- The **Green Party** (England and Wales) had around 46,000 members, a decrease from over 63,000 in 2015
- **UKIP** had around 34,000 members, a decrease from over 40,000 reported in December 2015
- The **Conservative Party** does not publish data on party membership in annual accounts

Data Sources

This note uses a range of sources to examine party membership and support in the UK, specifically membership levels, the income membership fees generate and the social characteristics of party members. For context, it also provides data on membership to non-party political organisations including trade unions, charities and campaigns.

Membership of UK political parties, as of 31 December 2015 & 2016



1. Introduction

In summer 2017 approximately 1.7% of the electorate belonged to either the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties. This is a rise compared to 2013, when membership of these three parties reached a historic low of around 0.8%. In contrast, in 1983 around 3.8% of the electorate were a member of the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties.

Change in UK political party membership has not been uniform either between parties or over time. Labour experienced a rise in membership ahead of the 1997 General Election before subsequently falling again. More recently the SNP, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green Party have all recorded rises.

As of June 2017, Labour has 552,000 members and, as of May 2017, the Liberal Democrats had over 102,000 members. As of August 2017, the SNP had 118,000 members, the Green Party (England and Wales) had 55,500 in 2017 and UKIP had 39,000 as at July 2016.

The Conservative Party does not routinely publish membership figures. As of December 2013 the party had an estimated 149,800 members, according to CCHQ.⁸ As of July 2016 the party had between 130,000 to 150,000 members, according to academic estimates.⁹

Political parties are under no legal obligation to publish membership statistics. There is no uniformly recognised definition of membership, nor is there an established method or body to monitor it. Three source types – figures voluntarily included in financial submissions to the Electoral Commission, party press releases and media estimates – form the basis of this briefing. Throughout, figures submitted to the Electoral Commission are used in charts and tables and are considered to be the most authoritative source.

Identification with political parties fell to a historical low in 2012 but has since risen to its highest level since 1987: The 33rd British Attitudes Survey found that in 2015 around 41% of people identified very or strongly with a political party. At the same time support for parties other than the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats is at a historic high. In June 2017 General Election, the share of vote won by parties other than the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats has decreased to just over 10% from under 25% in 2015.

Trade Union membership remains many times higher than party memberships (6.9 million in 2016/17, Certification Office).

Multiple non-party political campaigns and organisations, like Countryside Alliance and CND, claim memberships rivalling those of political parties (see section 4).

⁸ Mark Wallace, [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 -- up 11.7 per cent](#), Conservative Home, 28 September 2014.

⁹ The Financial Times, [Who, and where, are the Conservative party's members?](#), 8 July 2016

2. Trends in UK party membership

2.1 About the data

Political parties are under no official obligation to publish membership data. There is no commonly agreed definition of “party membership” nor any official body to monitor it. These three factors, together with continually evolving membership structures, mean that the quality of available data varies between parties and over time.

There are three main source types for party membership data:

Figures cited in submissions to the Electoral Commission

Many parties provide party membership figures for the year ending 31 December in annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission. All parties are required to submit these accounts by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000); however, they are not obliged to include membership data. When annual accounts do include these figures, they are probably the most reliable estimates available. The charts and tables throughout this paper use these figures wherever possible.

Party press releases

Party press releases (or data provided on request from party head offices) commonly provide the most up-to-date membership figures. However, they are both irregularly released - published at the whim of the party - and inconsistent over time and between parties. This is as parties are free to define and estimate “membership” themselves.

Media and academic estimates

Media and academic estimates can be used to supplement Electoral Commission submissions and party press releases. This is particularly necessary for the Conservative Party, which until 2013 did not publish membership estimates.

In many cases historical data series are only rough estimates and may overstate membership. Conservative membership prior to 1993 could have been exaggerated and the same may have been the case for Labour membership up to the 1980s. Now that political parties are required to publish their accounts, the figures (where given) are likely to be more reliable.

There is no commonly accepted definition of “party membership” or a “party member”. Some parties restrict the voting rights of certain members, for example, while others offer gradations in membership costs to suit a member’s desired level of engagement with the party. Most recently some parties have experimented with including social media followers within their membership or supporters total. Readers should be aware that what is meant by party membership can change – and keep this in mind when analysing membership data either between parties or over time.

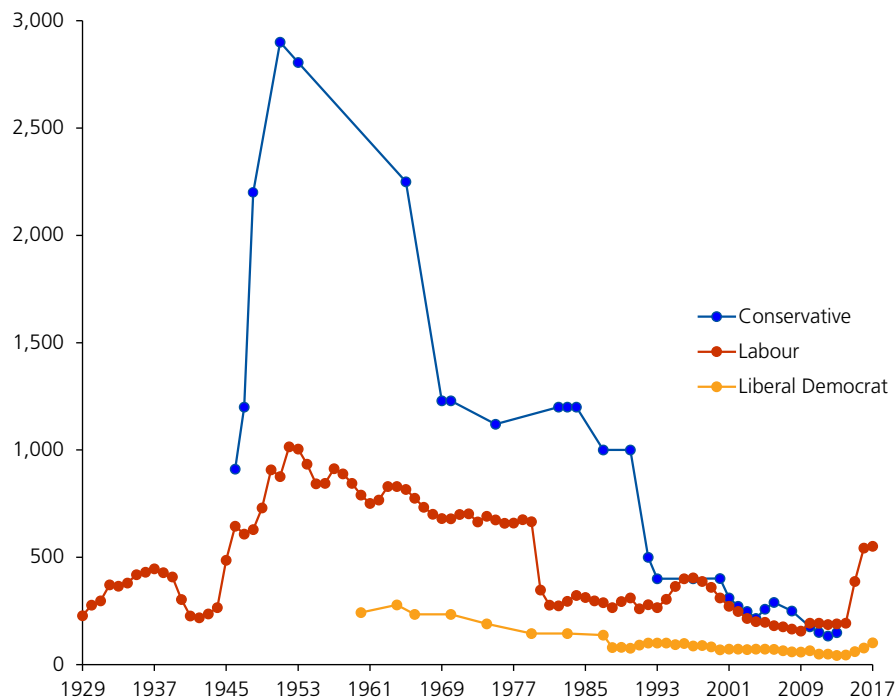
2.2 Historic trends: 1928 - 2002

On two occasions, in the years either side of the 1997 General Election and since the 2010 General Election, membership of the Labour Party has surpassed that of the Conservatives.

Membership peaked for both the Conservatives and Labour in the early 1950s. In 1953 the Conservative Party had a reported membership of 2.8 million; in the same year, Labour claimed over a million members. However, these figures are academic estimates and subsequent studies suggest estimates for both parties were inflated. Changes in monitoring practices introduced in the late 1970s improved the quality of Labour Party estimates; increased media and Parliamentary attention has encouraged improvements to Conservative Party estimates since the early-1990s.

Figure 1: Membership of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat* party 1929-2017

Membership, thousands



Notes: * Including predecessor parties.

Labour party membership figures for 2015 and 2017 include party members and affiliated supporters, but exclude registered supporters.

Sources:

1. David & Gareth Butler; British Political Facts (2011);
2. Patrick Seyd & Paul Whiteley; "British Party Members: An Overview", Party Politics, 10:4 (2004);
3. Susan Scarrow; Parties and their members: organising for victory in Britain and Germany (1996);
4. Labour Party annual conference reports
5. Conservative Home press releases (see section 2.3)
6. Labour and Liberal Democrat submissions to the Electoral Commission, 2002 onwards;
7. May Bulman, [Labour Party membership soars by 35,000 since general election](#), The Independent, 13 June 2017;
8. Liberal Democrat party Membership figure reported to be higher than 101,768 in Michael Wilkinson, [Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections](#), Liberal Democrats, 3 May 2017;

Conservative Party

Historically the Conservative Party has not produced systematic membership estimates, though in recent years Conservative Home has quoted estimates from CCHQ. This reluctance to publish estimates is due to the structure of the party and the process via which individuals become full members.¹⁰

First, the Conservative Party is strictly speaking three separate organisations: the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations (responsible for constituency associations), the Conservative Central Office and the Conservative Parliamentary Party (run from the Whip's office). This fragmentary nature was confirmed in 1982 by the Court of Appeal.

Second, historically individuals applied to join their local Conservative associations specifically; that an individual became a member of the national union did not necessarily follow.

Conservative Party membership climbed steeply after the Second World War, from about 910,000 in 1946 to a reported record high of 2.8 million in 1953. The Conservatives had more individual members than any other party up to the mid-1990s, when there were about 400,000 Conservative Party members.



Labour Party

The Labour Party has published figures for individual membership since 1928. Until 2004 figures were provided in the annual Conference Report published by the Party's National Executive Committee, and total membership is now recorded in Labour's financial statements.

Labour doubled its membership between 1928 (when membership figures were first reported) and 1937. Membership was down significantly during the Second World War but rose sharply in the immediate post-war period. In 1952 and 1953 the party claimed over one million members.

Reported membership fell from 666,000 to 348,000 between 1979 and 1980, but the large decrease was probably due to a change in reporting standards and suggests Labour's actual membership before 1980 was exaggerated. From 1956 Constituency Labour Parties were forced to record a minimum membership of 800, which likely inflated the national total.¹¹

Membership remained fairly constant throughout the 1980s before climbing in the mid-1990s following a recruitment drive. There was a fall in membership during Labour's time in office between 1997 and 2009, but it increased again in 2010.



¹⁰ Whitely, Paul; Seyed, Patrick; Richardson, Jeremy; True Blues: the politics of Conservative Party membership (Oxford, 1994)

¹¹ Thorpe; Op. Cit.; p227

Liberal Democrat Party and predecessors

Since the creation of the Liberal Democrats in 1988, membership data have been available from the party's internal leadership and presidential elections and more recently from its annual accounts.



Academics Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley estimate that the Liberal Party had over 243,000 members in 1960.¹² They estimate the combined membership of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party to have been approximately 145,000 in 1983 and 138,000 in 1987.¹³

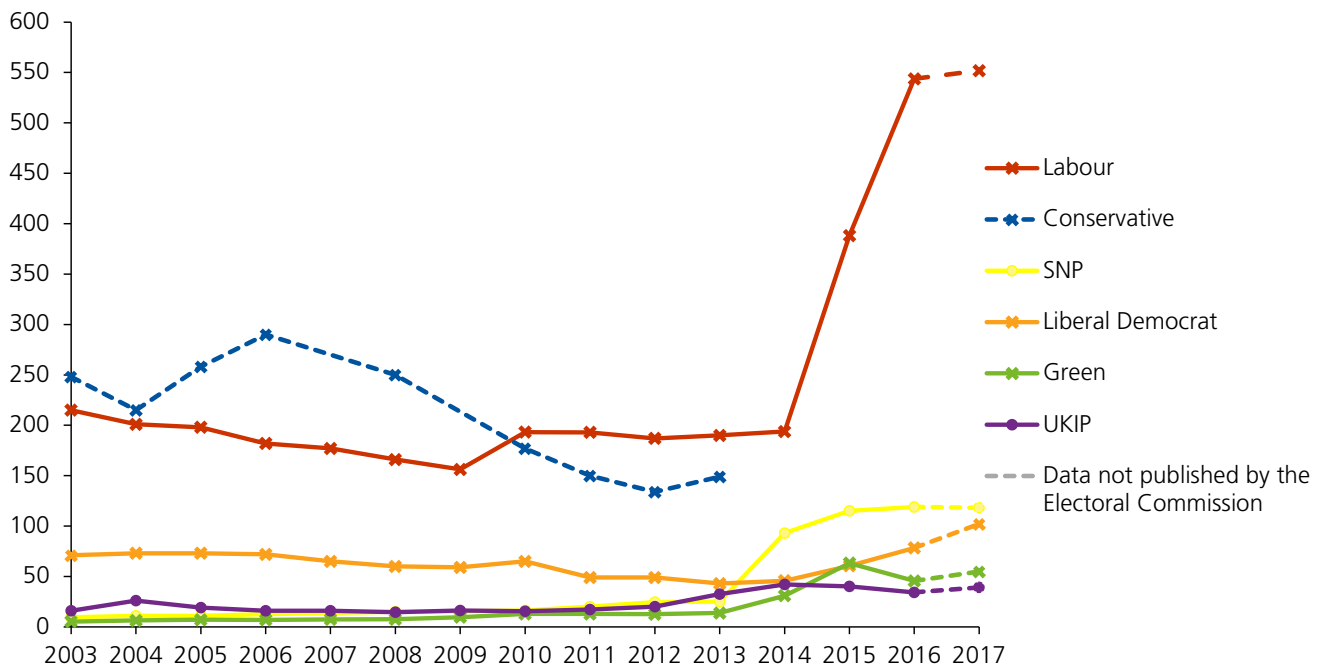
In 1988 the newly created Liberal Democrat Party reported its membership to be around 80,000. The Party claimed about 100,000 members in the early 1990s, falling to around 70,000 in the early 2000s.

2.3 Recent trends: 2002 – 2017

Figure 3 shows party membership figures from annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission, data from Parties' Head Offices and, in the case of the Conservatives, media estimates. Where available, **figure 3** shows latest available figures for 2016 and 2017 based on media reports and party press releases.

Figure 3 Party membership by party 2002-2017

Thousands (as at 31 each year and latest available data for 2017 as of August)



Note: Labour party membership figures for 2015 and 2016 include party members and affiliated supporters, but exclude registered supporters.

Sources: Prior to 2016 (All parties excluding Con) figures derived from party annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission year ending 31 December; 2016 figures, for all parties except Conservative, are based on information provided by Parties' head offices and recent estimates in news articles as of July 2016; Conservative membership figures derive from 2002-2006 Daily Telegraph; 2008 News of the World estimate; 2010 -2011 estimates reported by the Independent and Daily Mail 2013- 2014; May Bulman, [Labour Party membership soars by 35,000 since general election](#), The Independent, 13 June 2017; Liberal Democrat party Membership figure reported to be higher than 101,768; Michael Wilkinson, [Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections](#), Liberal Democrats, 3 May 2017.

¹² Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain, p10

¹³ Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley (2004), "British Party Members: An Overview", Party Politics, Vol 10 No 4, p357

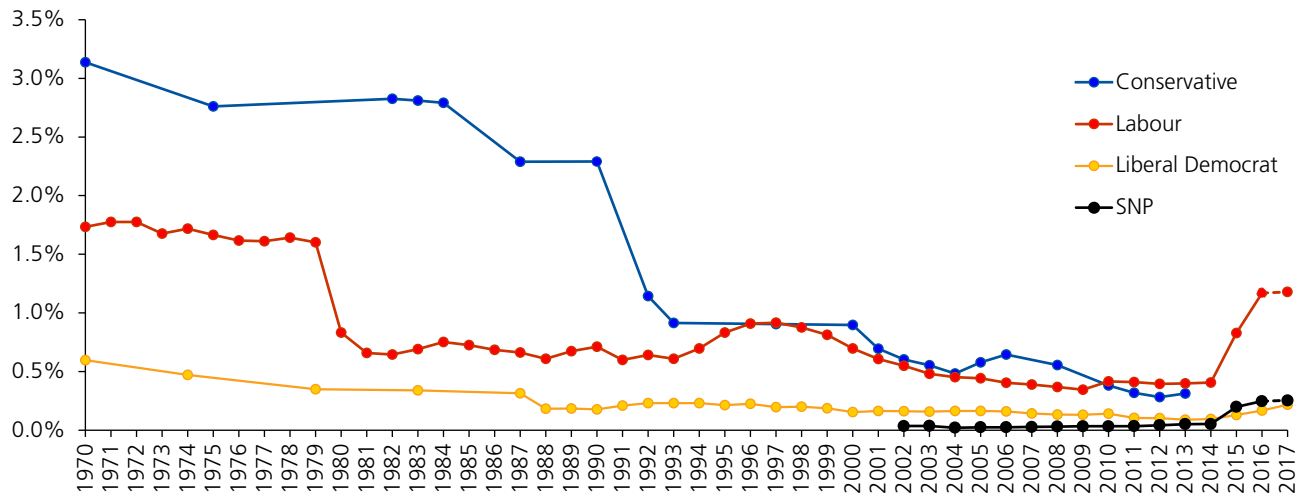
2.4 Membership as a percentage of electorate: 1970 – 2017

Membership of the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrat Parties increased to around 1.7% of the electorate in 2017, compared to a historic low point of 0.8 % in 2013. In the UK, Labour Party membership increased from 0.6% in 2013 to 1.5% in 2017.

In August 2017, SNP members represent 0.25% of the total UK electorate, an increase compared to 0.05% in 2013. Across Scotland, assuming all Scottish National Party members are in Scotland, SNP membership increased from 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 to 3.0% in 2017.

Calculation of party membership as proportion of electorate is based on assumption that latest party membership figures are accurate and that the Conservative party membership remained at 2013 level (latest data)

Figure 2 Party membership as share of electorate, UK, 1970-2017



Sources: David & Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts* (2011);
 Patric Seyd & Paul Whiteley; "British Party Members: An Overview", *Party Politics*, 10:4 (2004)
 Susan Scarrow; *Parties and their members: organising for victory in Britain and Germany* (1996)
 Labour Party annual conference reports
 Conservative Home press releases (see section 2.3)
 Labour and Liberal Democrat submissions to the Electoral Commission, 2002 onwards
 ONS Electoral Statistics 1970 – 1999 and later releases

Conservative Party

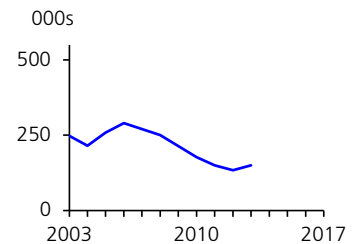
CCHQ does not routinely publish its membership estimates. The latest estimate published by CCHQ, for December 2013, reports 149,800 members.¹⁴ As of July 2016, Queen Mary University Professor Tim Bale estimated that Conservative Party has between 130,000 and 150,000 members.¹⁵

Conservative Party membership fell by more than half from 273,000 to 134,000 between 2002 and 2013, although the decline was temporarily reversed in the mid-2000s.¹⁶

In September 2012 former Conservative Party Co-Chairman Grant Shapps announced the creation of Conservative Party "Friends".¹⁷ Subsequently CCHQ has released membership estimates that, in addition to persons regarded as members in the traditional sense, "also tallies a larger figure for the wider party ...including donors, activist and others who play a supportive part but do not pay membership fees". In September 2014 Conservative Home reported this wider estimate to be 224,000.¹⁸



Conservative Party membership 2003-17



Green Party

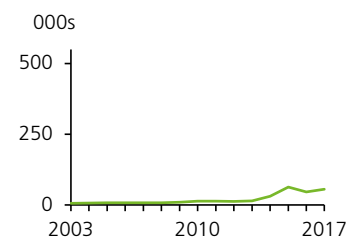
The BBC reports that Green Party (England and Wales) membership was over 55,000 members, as of March 2017.¹⁹ The latest data published in party annual accounts suggest that in December 2016 the party had under 46,000 members. This is a fall of around 18,000 members since 2015. As of December 2015 the Green Party (England and Wales) had 63,000 members, according to submissions to the Electoral Commission.²⁰ Across the UK, Green Party press releases claimed roughly 70,000 people are a members of the "combined UK Green Parties" in 2015.²¹

Membership of the Green Party (England and Wales) held level at approximately 5,000 members between 1998 and 2002. Having steadied at just over 7,000 members 2005-2008, it jumped to 9,600 in 2009 and to 12,800 in 2010 (the year in which the party won its first MP).

Charts and tables throughout this paper refer to the membership of the Green Party (England and Wales) only, as opposed to a combined "UK Green Parties" total, as the Green Party (England and Wales), the Scottish Green Party and the Green Party in Northern Ireland are each registered separately with the Electoral Commission.



Green Party membership 2003-17



¹⁴ Mark Wallace, [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 – up 11.7 per cent](#), Conservative Home, 28 September 2014

¹⁵ Tim Bale, [Who, and where, are the Conservative party's members?](#), The Financial Times, 8 July 2016

¹⁶ Paul Goodman, [CCHQ declares Conservative Party membership to be 134,000](#), Conservative Home, 17 September 2013

¹⁷ Grant Shapps, [Yes, Party Membership will survive but it will change](#), Conservative Home, 18 September 2013

¹⁸ Mark Wallace, [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 – up 11.7 per cent](#), Conservative Home, 28 September 2014

¹⁹ BBC news, [Guide to the parties: Green Party](#), 18 May 2017

²⁰ Green Party, [More Members than the Germans: UK Green parties hit 70,000](#), 26 April 2015

²¹ Ibid.

Labour Party

Labour has around 552,000 members as of June 2017, according to data published by the Independent.²² This is an increase of 8,000 members compared to the peak of 544,000 members in December 2016.²³

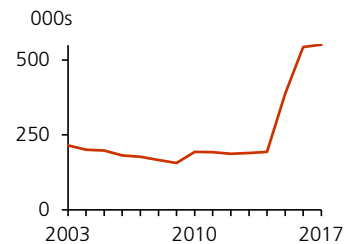
Party membership rose immediately following General Election 2015. 422,664 of people voted in the September 2015 leadership contest, in which 59.5% voted for Jeremy Corbyn.²⁴ In December 2015 Labour party had 388,000 members, according to accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission.²⁵

There was a fall in membership during Labour's time in office between 1997 and 2009, but it increased again in 2010. In each year between 2010 and 2014 the Party's membership has held level at approximately 190,000 members.

Section 2.4 provides further detail on the broader membership of the Labour Party, including estimates of registered and affiliated supporters.



Labour Party membership 2003-17



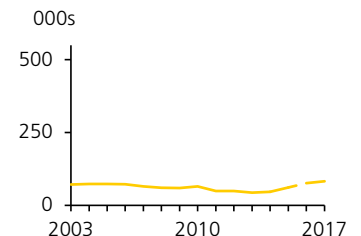
Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrat Party has around 102,000 members, as of May 2017 according to Party's Head Office. This was a rise of around 14,000 new members in: "the two weeks since the [2017] General Election was called".²⁶ This is the Party's highest membership figure since 1994. Another increase in Liberal Democrat party membership was reported after General Election in May 2015.²⁷

The Liberal Democrats claimed about 100,000 members in the early 1990s, falling to around 70,000 in the early 2000s. Membership fell sharply after the 2010 General Election, from 65,000 in 2010 to about 49,000 in 2011. In April 2014 the Party claimed around 44,000 members.²⁸



Liberal Democrats Party membership 2002-17



Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru had 8,273 members, as of July 2016, according to information from the Party's Central Office. This same figure was reported by The Express for 2017.²⁹ This is a slight increase compared to 8,015 in December 2015.³⁰ On 27 January 2012 Steven Morris of the Guardian reported the party's membership as 7,863.³¹



²² May Bulman, [Labour Party membership soars by 35,000 since general election](#), The Independent, 13 June 2017

²³ Labour Party annual accounts for 2016, Electoral Commission

²⁴ Labour Party's press release, [Results of the Labour Leadership elections](#), 12 September 2015

²⁵ Labour Party annual accounts for 2015, Electoral Commission

²⁶ Membership figure reported to be higher than 101,768. Michael Wilkinson, [Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections](#), Liberal Democrats, 3 May 2017

²⁷ Speed, Barbara; [What does the Lib Dem membership surge mean for the struggling party?](#) (The New Statesman, 17 June 2015

See also: Barford, Vasnessa; [Why do people join loosing political parties?](#), BBC News, 16 May 2015

²⁸ Liberal Democrat Press Releases, [Lib Dem membership surge continues](#), 2 April 2014

²⁹ Express, [Plaid Cymru Party Profile](#), 2017 (reported figure 8,273 as at 2017)

³⁰ Information from Plaid Cymru's Head Office, 2 August 2016

³¹ Plaid Cymru, [Plaid publishes report to move the Party of Wales forward](#), 17 January 2012

Scottish National Party (SNP)

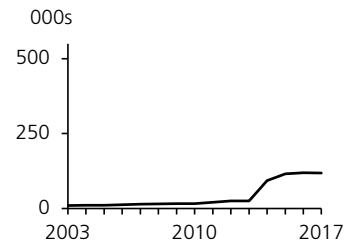
There are around 118,000 members of the Scottish National Party, as of August 2017, according to information from the Party's Central Office. This was a slight decrease compared to almost 119,000 members in December 2016.³²

Having recorded 16,000 members in 2002, membership of the Scottish National Party fell to 9,500 members in 2003. It has risen in every year since then. Membership rose by approximately 1,000 new members each year to reach around 16,000 members in 2010. In 2011 membership jumped to 20,000, then to 24,000 in 2012. As of 31st December 2013 membership was reported as 25,000.

Following the Scottish Independence Referendum (18 September 2014) the SNP experienced a rapid rise in membership. On 23 September 2014 the party claimed its membership was on course to double its pre-referendum total;³³ on 10 October membership was reported to have reached 80,000.³⁴ A party press release dated 30 January 2015 stated the party had around 93,000 members.³⁵ According to the Electoral Commission as of 31 December 2015 Party had around 115,000 members.³⁶



Scottish National Party membership 2003-17



United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

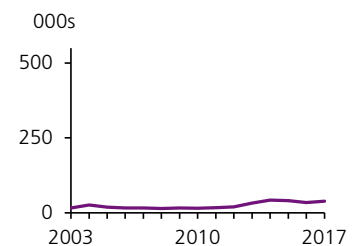
UKIP has 39,000 members, as of July 2016, according to the Party's Head Office. UKIP's membership averaged 42,500 during 2015, with a peak of 45,994 at the General Election in May.³⁷ In 2014 UKIP membership had increased by almost 10,000 members, to 42,200 in December 2014, compared to 32,400 in December 2013 (according to accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission).

Increases in UKIP's membership in the past coincided with European Parliament elections. Membership initially jumped from 10,000 in 2002 to peak at 26,000 members in 2004 when the Party won 12 seats in elections to the European Parliament (up from two previously). Membership subsequently fell again to 16,000 in 2006.

Membership has increased every year from 2010 until 2015. Starting from 15,000, the Party claimed 20,000 members in 2012 and 32,000 as of the Party's submission to the Electoral Commission on 31 December 2013. On 16 June 2014 a party press release claimed around 39,000 members.³⁸



UK Independence Party membership 2003-17



³² Scottish National Party annual accounts for 2016, Electoral Commission

³³ Scottish National Party press release, [SNP on course to double membership](#), 23 September 2014

³⁴ Scottish National Party press release, [SNP membership reaches 80,000](#), 10 October 2014

³⁵ Scottish National Party press release, [SNP begins biggest ever members consultation](#), 30 January 2015

³⁶ Scottish National Party accounts 2015, Electoral Commission

³⁷ Information from UK independence party Head Office (as at July 2016)

³⁸ UKIP press release, [UKIP is delighted to announce yet another record membership figure](#), 16 June 2014

2.5 Broader membership of the Labour Party

The relationship of trade unions to the Labour Party has changed in recent years. In March 2014 then Party leader Ed Miliband announced reforms at a special conference. Labour now has three tiers of members/supporters:

Party members: individual members pay an annual fee, are able to attend conference and constituency meetings, are able to represent the Party and, if eligible, vote in party elections (such as selection of party representatives, mayor candidates and leader).

Affiliated supporters: affiliated supporters are members of an affiliate (levy paying) trade union or another organisation, full lists of which are available online.³⁹ They are entitled to attend all Constituency Labour Party member meetings and to attend Conference as visitors; they can vote in leadership, deputy leadership and mayoral elections. Affiliated supporters cannot represent the party, nor can they vote on the selection of party representatives.⁴⁰

Registered supporters: the Registered Supporters Scheme was created in 2010 following the Refounding Labour review⁴¹. At the time registered supporters paid a £3 fee and they now have the right to vote in leadership, deputy leadership and London mayoral elections. As of August 2016 the fee of registered supporters is £25.⁴²

In September 2015's Leadership election, won by Jeremy Corbyn with 59.5% of the vote, 422,664 people voted. This included 245,520 members, 105,598 registered supporters and 71,546 affiliated supporters.⁴³

In last year's Leadership election Jeremy Corbyn was re-elected with 61.1% of the vote. A total of 506,438 people voted, of which 285,176 were members, 121,527 were registered supporters and 99,745 were affiliated supporters.⁴⁴

The broader Labour Movement comprises members of affiliated trade unions (ATUs) and the Socialist and Cooperative societies alongside official Party members (members of constituency Labour parties). Prior to the reforms of 2014, ATUs had half the votes at the Labour Party Conference. In 2011, the Party received £8.0 million from these affiliated groups compared with membership income of £5.2 million.

Up to 1992 The Labour Party Conference Report included membership figures for the ATUs and the Socialist and Cooperative (Soc&Coop) societies. ATU membership rose rapidly in the years immediately following the Second World War. It peaked at 6.5 million in 1979 but

³⁹ For a full list of Labour's affiliated Trade Unions, see the [Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation](#). For a full list of Labour's affiliated socialist societies, see the Party's [website](#).

⁴⁰ Collins, Ray; [The Collins Review into Labour Party Reform](#), February 2014, pg. 23

⁴¹ Hain, Peter; [Refounding Labour to win: a party for the new generation](#) (2010) pg 15

⁴² Conor Pope) Surge of registered supporters for leadership vote tops 180,00 in 48 hours, LabourList.org, 21 July 2016

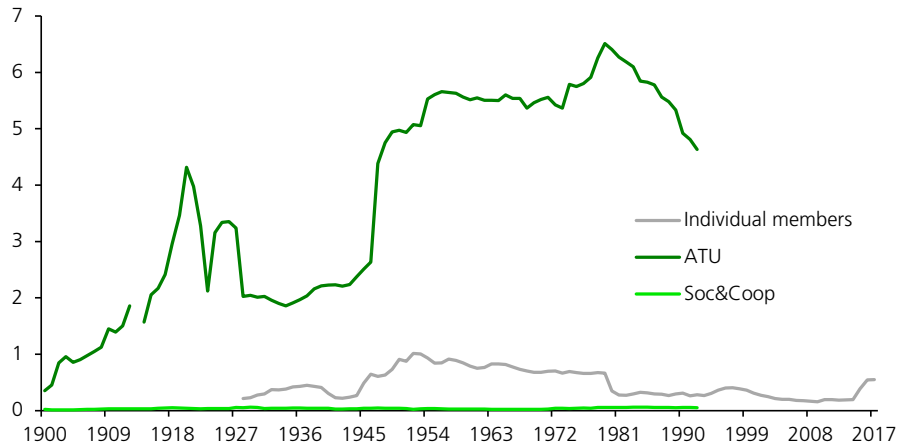
⁴³ Grice, Andrew; [Labour ordered to vet members who apply to join party amid fears 'entryists' signing up to vote for Jeremy Corbyn](#), The Independent, 4 August 2015

⁴⁴ Labour Leadership Election 2016, [Results](#)

then fell steadily over the 1980s. In 1992 ATU membership was 4.6 million.

Figure 4: Broader membership of the “Labour Movement” 1900-2017

Membership, millions



Individual party membership also increased in the immediate post-war period. In 1952, there were 1.0 million individual party members, representing about one-sixth of broad Labour membership. The sudden decline in individual members as a proportion of broad membership after 1979 is attributable to the likely inflation of membership figures before 1980.

Momentum

Momentum is a grassroots campaigning network of over 23,000 members and 150 local groups, which evolved out of Jeremy Corbyn’s 2015 election campaign. The organisation describes its activities as: “Momentum supports the Labour party, and works to increase participation and engagement in the party to enable it to win elections and enter Government”.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Momentum website, [About Momentum](#), accessed 31 August 2017

3. Social characteristics: party members & supporters

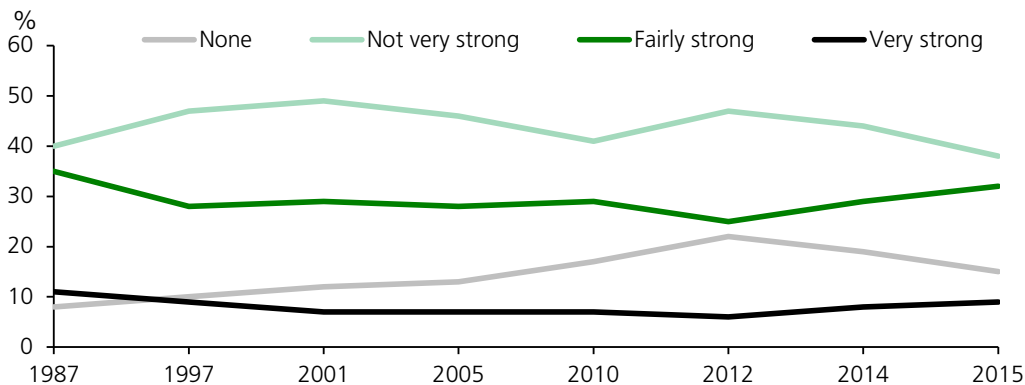
In 2017, the average age for party members of Conservative, Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrats were between 52 and 57, and BME representation was low, ranging between 3% and 4%. Identification with political parties fell to a historic low in 2012, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey, but has since risen to its highest level since 1987.

This section uses a range of academic studies to examine the social characteristics of party members and supporters. Each study cited below follows a unique series of assumptions and methods. Caution should thus be taken when making comparisons between each source.

3.1 Identification and affiliation with political parties: historic trends

Successive British Social Attitudes Surveys suggest that Identification with political parties fell between 1987 and 2012, before rising in 2014 and 2015. In 1987 the proportion of the public who identified with a political party ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ strongly was 46%, compared to 31% in 2012. Over the same period the proportion who felt no identification with a political party rose from 8% in 1987 to 22% in 2012, before falling to 15% in 2015.

Figure 5a: Strength of party identification



Source: British Social Attitudes Survey

Party identification may, however, again be on the rise. Having reached a historic low in 2012, the proportion who identify with a party ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ strongly rose to 37% in 2012 and to 41% in 2015 – the highest level in any British Social Attitudes Survey since 1987.

Figure 5b: Strength of party identification, selected years 1987-2015 (%)

	1987	1997	2001	2005	2010	2012	2014	2015
Very strong	11	9	7	7	7	6	8	9
Fairly strong	35	28	29	28	29	25	29	32
Not very strong	40	47	49	46	41	47	44	38
None	8	10	12	13	17	22	19	15

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey 33 Political report, page 15

3.2 Social composition of party membership

Queen Mary's University/ YouGov published their report [*Grassroots: Britain's party members: who they are, what they think, and what they do*](#) in January 2018, collated from survey data from more than 4,000 party members across the UK. The report, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, is based on a survey of Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, and SNP party members following the June 2017 election. It provides information on the demographic and ideological differences between party members.

The results showed that there were demographical and ideological differences across parties.

Differing demographics

For all four parties members are more likely to be male, older and white than the average Briton.

The average age of Conservative party members was 57, Labour 53, Lib Dems 52 and SNP 54. 18-24 year olds make up a similar proportion of total membership across all four parties, ranging from between 4% and 6%. However, the Conservatives have an older demographic: 44% of Conservative members belong to the 65+ age group in comparison to 29% of Labour, 30% of Liberal Democrats and 32% of SNPs.

Women make up a different proportion of each party: 71% of Conservative members are male, compared to 63% of Lib Dems, 57% of SNP and 53% of Labour.

BME representation is low across all parties: between 96% and 97% of party membership are White.

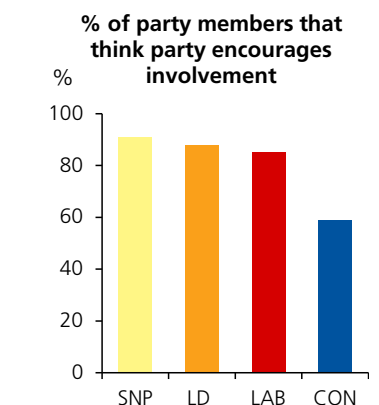
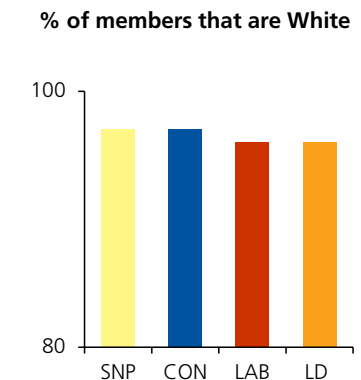
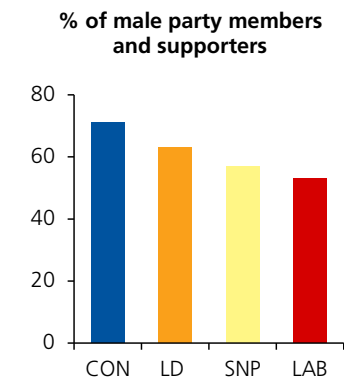
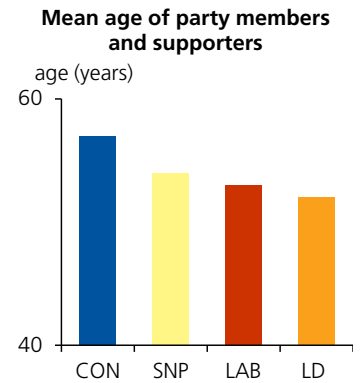
Reasons for party membership

Members had varying reasons for joining their respective party, as evidenced in a scale of 1 to 10 of importance. SNP members were most likely to join to support party policies, ranked as 8.8 importance, whereas this was 8.1 for Labour and Liberal Democrats and 7.6 for Conservatives. SNP members also ranked belief in party leadership as a reason for joining higher than other parties, at 8.2. This can be compared to 7.3 for Labour, 6.9 for Conservatives and 5.7 for Liberal Democrats.

Amongst the benefits of being a party member, over 80% of all people surveyed agreed that party members can change the community or country. And over 60% of people agreed that getting active was a good way to meet interesting people. However, members across all parties also agreed that a negative of membership was that party activism often takes time away from one's family (Lib Dems 64%, Conservatives 60%, Labour 55%, SNP 50%).

Party engagement

59% of Conservative members agree that their party encourages members to get involved. This is less than the other parties: 91% of SNP members, 88% of Lib Dem members and 85% of Labour members agree so. Conservative members are also less likely to agree that



members have a say on party policy – 28% compared to 75% of Lib Dem members, 73% of SNP members and 61% of Labour members.

When members were asked whether they would increase the amount they had done for their party in the last five years responses varied. 28% of Conservative members said that they would, in comparison to 39% of Lib Dems, 45% of Labour members and 47% of SNP members.

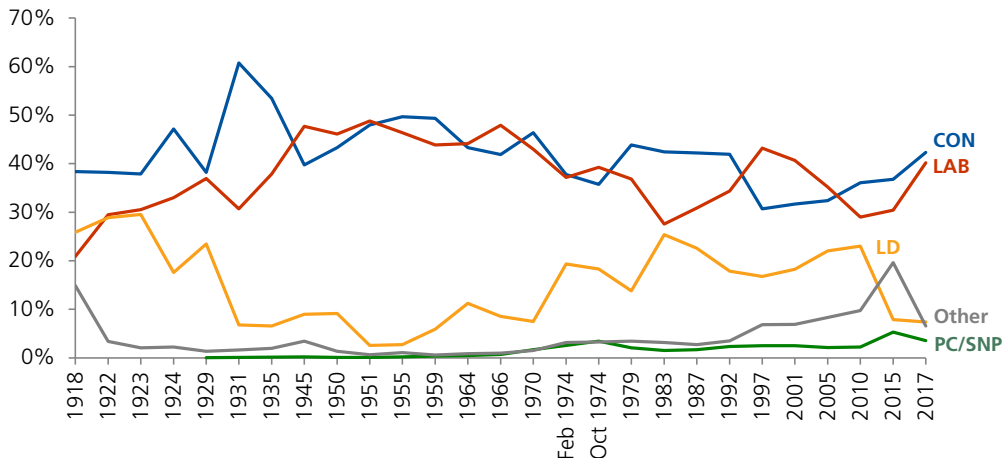
4.3 Voting – the rise and fall of “other” parties

In June 2017 General Election, the share of the vote won by parties other than the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats has decreased to just over 10% from about 25% in 2015.

The May 2015 General Election marked the highest share of vote won by “other” parties at any General Election since 1945. This trend has changed in 2017, when the vote share of the UK Independence Party fell to under 2% from around 13% in 2015. In 2017, the Scottish National Party won just over 3% of the total UK vote, compared to around 5% in 2015.

Detailed analysis of Election in UK since 1918 is available in: [House of Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-7529](#)

Figure 7 Share of the vote by the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and “other” parties at UK general elections 1918 – 2017



Note: Liberal vote share includes votes for Liberal/SDP alliance (1983-87) and Liberal Democrats from 1992. 1918 data includes all Ireland. Source: House of Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-7529

parties at General Elections since 1945. Between 1945 and 1970 the three main parties won between 96%-99% of the vote at each General Election. The three main parties won 99% of the vote in every General Election 1950-1964 and 98% of the vote in the 1966 General Election.

The sustained rise of “other” parties began in 1987. The share of the vote won by the three main parties has fallen in every General Election since 1987, in which the three main parties won 96% of the vote and

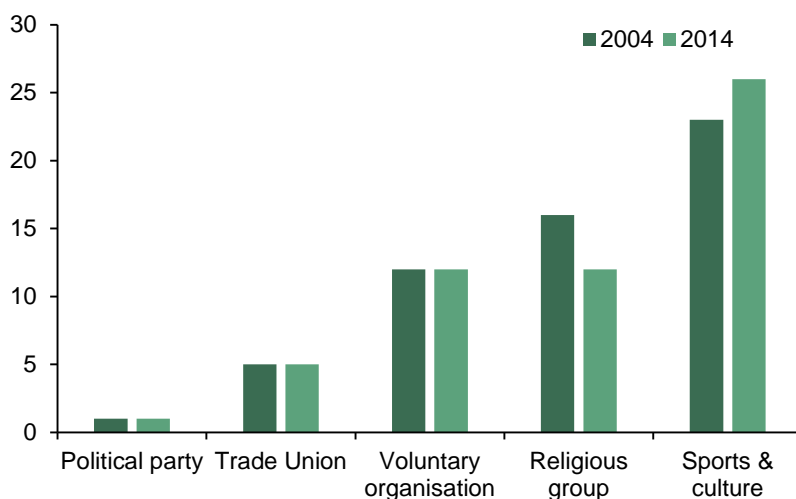
“others” 4%. In 1992 “others” won 6% of the vote, 9% in 1997 and 2001, 10% in 2005 and almost 25% in 2015.⁴⁶

4. Non-party political activity and engagement

In 2016/17, trade union membership was at its lowest level since 1945, according to the Certification Office. It remains, nonetheless, higher than party membership levels.⁴⁷ Interest in politics has remained relatively constant since 1986, but decreased in 2017 compared to 2016.⁴⁸

In 2014, 26% of people described themselves as an active member of a sports, leisure or cultural group, 12% of a religious group and 12% of a voluntary organisation. This remains notably above political party membership. In 2014 around 1% of people described themselves as an active member of a political party.

Figure 8 Percentage of people actively participating in selected organisations (%)



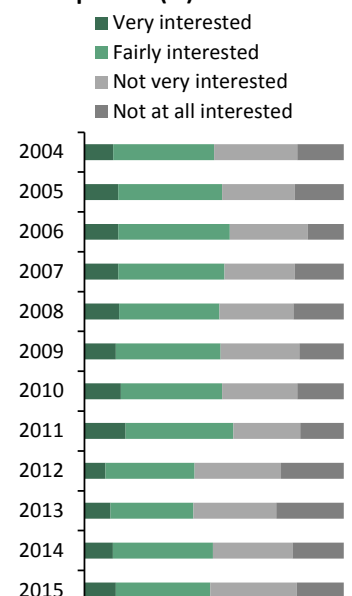
Source [British Social Attitudes Survey 32 Politics report](#), page 5

The BSA survey shows that, in 2014, a further 7% of respondents described themselves as belonging to but not actively participating in a political party. This is likely an exaggeration of the true percentage of political party members; as the BSA puts it, “some of our respondents were probably claiming psychological rather than paid membership”.

4.1 Interest in politics

The Hansard Society’s Audit of Political Engagement 2017 suggests that of interest in politics decreased comparing previous year. In 2017, 43% of 18-24 year olds surveyed described themselves as very or fairly

Figure 9a: Interest in politics (%)



⁴⁶ In this calculation the “other” parties include all parties other than the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats

⁴⁷ Certification Office, [Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2016-2017](#)

⁴⁸ Hansard Society, [The 2017 report of Audit of Political Engagement 14](#), p. 38

interested, compared to 50% in 2016. Similarly, the share of white population very or fairly interested in politics decreased from 60% in 2016 to 56% in 2017. Interest in politics among BME population changed slightly (34% compared to 35% in 2016).⁴⁹

Public interest in politics increased slightly between 1986 and 2015 despite a long term decline in party membership, the 33rd British Social Attitudes Survey reports.⁵⁰ In 1986 29% of people said they were interested in politics either a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot'. In 2015 36% of people did so. The percentage of people to describe themselves as having 'not much' interest in politics or 'none at all' fell from 39% in 1986 to 32% in 2015, after rising to 37% in 2013. Interest in politics is lower among the young. The Office for National Statistics Measuring National Wellbeing Program (2014) found in 2011- 12 that 42% of adults aged 16-24 expressed no interest compared to 21% of those aged 65 and over. Overall 28% of adults surveyed were 'not at all interested' by politics.⁵¹

4.2 Trade union membership

In 2016/17 there were 6.87 million trade union members in the UK, according to the Certification Office, a 1.2% decrease since 2015/16. This is the lowest total since 1945 according to records kept by the Department of Employment Statistics Division (1892-1974) and the Certification Office (1974-present)⁵².

According to the Labour Force Survey 6.22 million - under a quarter of all employees in the UK (23.5%), were trade union members in 2016. It is a 4.2% decrease compared to 2015, the lowest total since the LFS began collecting UK data in 1995.⁵³

Trade union membership nonetheless remains, according to both data series, larger than party membership levels by an order of magnitude.

Figure 10a shows trade union membership in the UK since 1892. Membership peaked in 1979 at over 13 million employees, before declining sharply.

Figure 10a Membership of trade unions in the UK, 1892 to 2016/17

Millions

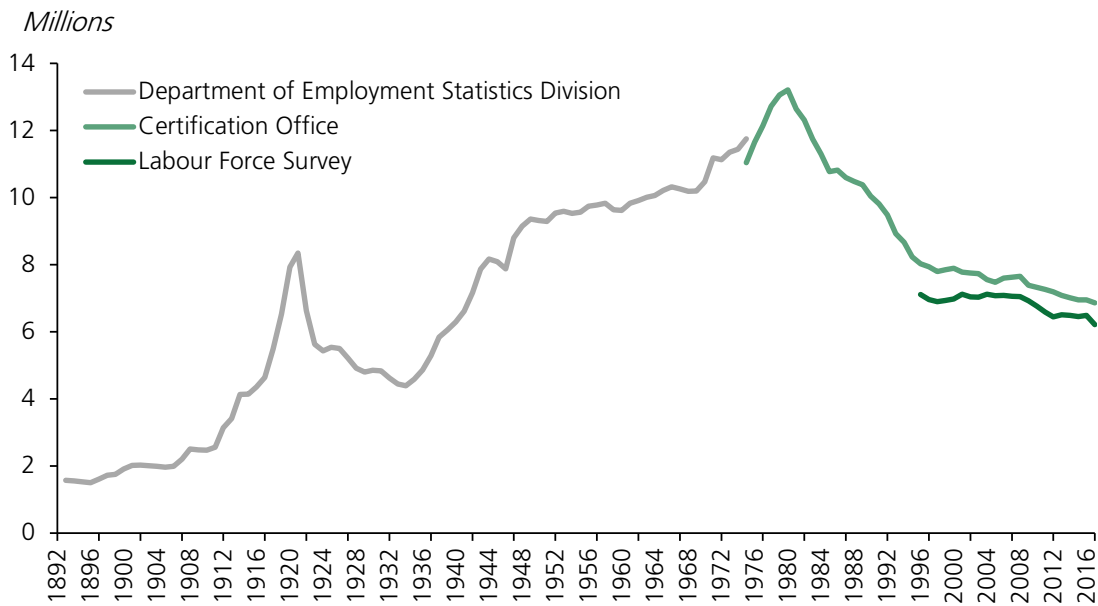
⁴⁹ Hansard Society; [Audit of Political Engagement 14 \(2017\)](#) p. 41.

⁵⁰ Simpson, Ian; Phillips, Miranda; [\(British Social Attitudes Survey 33\)](#) Politics

⁵¹ Randall, Chris (ONS); [Measuring National Well-being- Governance, 2014](#)

⁵² Certification Office, [Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2016-2017](#)

⁵³ ONS, Labour Force Survey 2016, [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2016](#)



Sources:

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; [Trade Union Statistics 2016](#)

Certification Office (2017) [Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2016-2017](#)

Figure 10b shows that female employees are now more likely to be trade union members than their male counterparts. In 2016 around 26% of female employees were trade union members, compared with 21% of male employees.

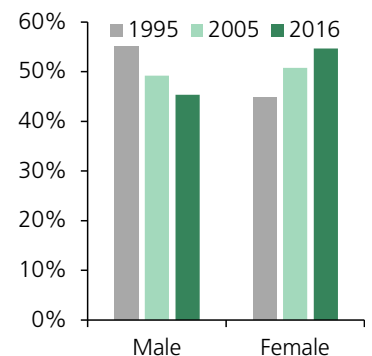
This is a reversal of the situation in 1995, when just under 29% of female and around 35% of male employees were trade union members. Older individuals are more likely to be trade union members. Around 56% of trade union member employees were aged over 35 in 2016. Just under 53% of public sector employees were union members compared to over 13% of those who worked in public sector

In 2016, almost 42% of employees in professional occupations were union members. Just over 12% of **Managers, Directors and Senior Officials** were members in trade unions, followed by 15% of employees in **Sales and Customer Service Occupations**.

Accommodation and food service activities sector had the lowest rate of trade union membership (3%), compared to almost half of employees in Education sector (48%).

Those holding associate professional and technical occupations account for 13% of members, caring, leisure and other service occupations 11% and administrative and secretarial occupations 9%.⁵⁴

Figure 10b: Trade Union membership by gender, 1995, 2005 & 2016



4.3 Non-party political campaigns

This sub-section provides information on a range of organisations active in today's political landscape. It is not intended as a comprehensive overview of all non-party political bodies.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)

⁵⁴ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; [Trade Union Statistics 2016](#)

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was founded in January 1958. CND membership is thought to have peaked in the early-mid 1980s: in 1984 CND local membership was approximately 250,000 while in 1985 CND national membership was approximately 110,000. By 1988 this had fallen to around 130,000 local members and 70,000 national members. The Independent estimated that CND had 32,000 members in 2005. CND's 2016 accounts reported a total income of around £739,000, of which subscriptions and regular giving accounted for around £327,000, an increase compared to £315,000 in 2015.⁵⁵

Campaign to Protect Rural England

The 'Council for the Preservation of Rural England', later the Campaign to Protect Rural England, was formed in 1926 by Sir Patrick Abercrombie. The Campaign claims to have a presence in every English county and over 200 local groups.⁵⁶ The charity's website indicates that it has 40,000 members around England.⁵⁷ In 2016/17 around 25%, or around £1.8 million, of income was Membership & regular donations.⁵⁸

Countryside Alliance

The Countryside Alliance was formed in 1997 in reaction to the newly elected Labour Government's pledge to ban hunting with dogs and to promote the rural economy. The Alliance currently claims around 100,000 members (as of August 2017).⁵⁹

The People's Assembly Against Austerity

The People's Assembly Against Austerity was launched on 5th February 2013 with a letter to The Guardian, signed by numerous trade union officials, journalists and activists. As of July 2014 it had approximately 80 local groups operating across Great Britain and around 40,000 people are signed up to its national mailing list. On 20 June 2015 the Assembly claimed around 250,000 people attended its anti-austerity march in London, though this estimate cannot be independently verified.⁶⁰ On 16 April 2016 as The Guardian estimates that: 'anything between 50,000 and 150,000 marched' in their event.⁶¹

⁵⁵ CND, [Council Members' Report and Financial Statements for year ending 31/12/2016](#)

⁵⁶ CPRE, [Annual Review 2014/15](#)

⁵⁷ CPRE website, [How you can help section](#), accessed 31 August 2017

⁵⁸ CPRE, [Annual Review 2016/17](#)

⁵⁹ Countryside Alliance website, [About us section](#), accessed 31 August 2017

⁶⁰ (BBC News); [Thousands attend anti-austerity rallies across UK](#) (20 June 2015)

⁶¹ The Guardian, [The People's Assembly march was a display of anger – that's how change starts](#)

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