



BRIEFING PAPER

Number CBP 7483, 27 March 2020

Social background of MPs 1979-2019

By Lukas Audickas,
Richard Cracknell

Inside:

1. Gender
2. LGBT+
3. Age
4. Ethnicity
5. Parliamentary experience
6. Education
7. Occupation



Contents

Summary	3
1. Gender	4
2. LGBT+	6
3. Age	7
4. Ethnicity	9
5. Parliamentary experience	10
6. Education	12
7. Occupation	15

Contributing Authors:

Chris Watson, Alexander Bellis, Cassie Barton,
Elise Uberoi, Vyara Apostolova, Lydia Jackson

Summary

This briefing paper provides data on the gender, age, ethnicity and educational backgrounds of Members of Parliament elected at the 2019 General Election and how this has changed since 1979:

- There were 220 female MPs elected at the 2019 General Election (34% of all MPs). This was the highest ever number and proportion. In 1979 there were 19 women MPs, 3% of the total.
- Since 1979, the average age of MPs has remained around 50 years. 49% of MPs elected in 2019 were aged over 50. Members aged 18-29 and those over 70 each represented 3% of the total. As at March 2020, comprehensive information about age was not available most of the MPs who were newly elected in 2019, see section 3 for details.
- In 2019, 65 MPs were from non-white backgrounds, 10% of the total. This was an increase of 25% compared to 52 in 2017. In contrast, there were 4 ethnic minority MPs elected in 1987. Currently, around 15% of the UK population is from a non-white background.
- Conservative MPs elected at the 2019 General Election were the most likely to have attended a fee-paying school: 41% compared to 30% Liberal Democrat, 14% Labour and 7% SNP, according to data published by the Sutton Trust.

This paper also looks at the parliamentary experience of MPs elected in 2019. Of MPs elected at the 2019 General Election:

- 495 of 650 (76%) were Members at dissolution of the 2017 Parliament and were re-elected;
- 140 of 650 (22%) were first elected in 2019 having no previous House of Commons experience.
- In addition, 15 Members elected in 2019 who had not been MPs when Parliament dissolved but had previously been MPs and returned after a break.

Further data on UK elections prior to 1979 is available in the [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2019 – A century of elections](#) briefing paper, by the House of Commons Library.

Note that this paper refers to 'Liberal Democrats' (or LD) throughout, despite the party only existing since 1988 when the Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party (SDP) merged. For earlier years, figures attributed to the LD include the MPs for the Liberal Party and the SDP, the latter in existence between 1981 and 1988.

1. Gender

220 female MPs were elected at the 2019 General Election (34% of all MPs), This is the highest ever number and proportion. There were 19 female MPs in 1979, 3% of the total. The number of female MPs rose slowly over the next three parliaments to 60 in 1992 and doubled to 120 in 1997, following Labour's election victory. That number fell back to 118 at the 2001 election but rose again at each subsequent general election.

1. Men and women MPs 1979 to 2019				
Election	Men	Women	Total	% women
1979	616	19	635	3%
1983	627	23	650	4%
1987	609	41	650	6%
1992	591	60	651	9%
1997	539	120	659	18%
2001	541	118	659	18%
2005	518	128	646	20%
2010	507	143	650	22%
2015	459	191	650	29%
2017	442	208	650	32%
2019	430	220	650	34%

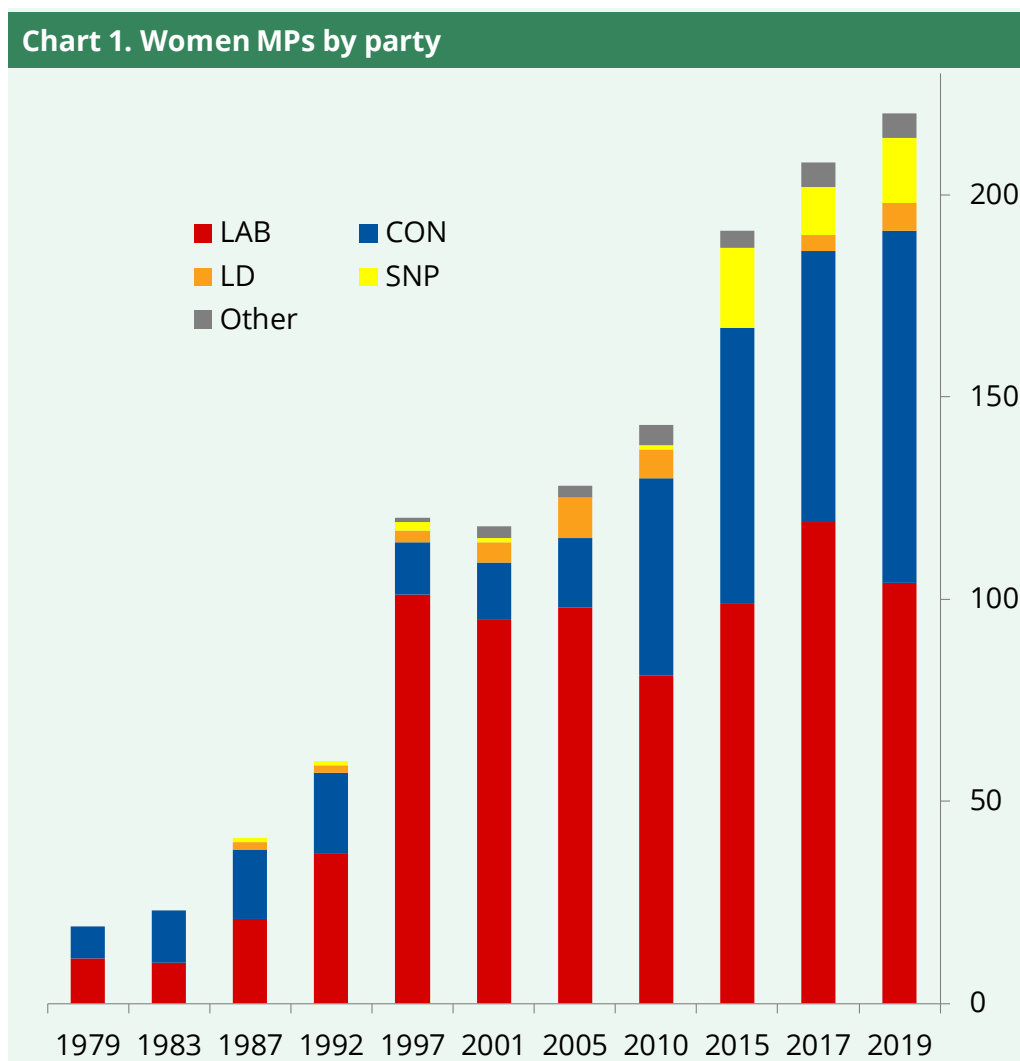
As table 2 shows, of the three main parties, Labour generally has had the highest number and proportion of female MPs.

2. Women MPs by Party					
	LAB	CON	LD	SNP	Other
Number					
1979	11	8	0	0	0
1983	10	13	0	0	0
1987	21	17	2	1	0
1992	37	20	2	1	0
1997	101	13	3	2	1
2001	95	14	5	1	3
2005	98	17	10	0	3
2010	81	49	7	1	5
2015	99	68	0	20	4
2017	119	67	4	12	6
2019	104	87	7	16	6
Percentage of women MPs by party					
1979	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%
1983	5%	3%	0%	0%	0%
1987	9%	5%	9%	33%	0%
1992	14%	6%	10%	33%	0%
1997	24%	8%	7%	33%	4%
2001	23%	8%	10%	20%	13%
2005	28%	9%	16%	0%	12%
2010	31%	16%	12%	17%	22%
2015	43%	21%	0%	36%	17%
2017	45%	21%	33%	34%	25%
2019	51%	24%	64%	33%	25%

Sources: Kavanagh and Cowley, The British General Election of 2017 & previous editions House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons: Background Paper](#), 21 August 2018, and House of Commons Library, [General Election 2019: full results and analysis](#), 28 January 2020

Chart 1 shows the number of female MPs since 1979 by party. The highest increase was recorded after the 1997 General Election when 101 female Labour MPs were elected, compared to 37 in 1992. Female representation amongst Conservative MPs rose more slowly than for Labour, although there was a significant increase in the 2010 election from 17 to 49 female Conservative MPs.

In 2019, the number of female Conservative MPs increased by 20 to 87, 24% of all Conservative MPs. The 2019 General Election also marked the first time when there were more female Labour MPs than male (51%). Although, the total number of female Labour MPs decreased from 119 in 2017 to 104 in 2019.



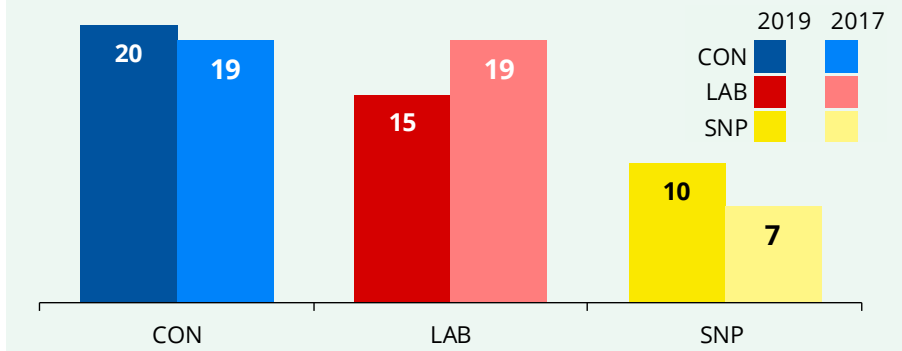
Sources: House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons: Background Paper](#), 21 August 2018, and House of Commons Library [General Election 2019: full results and analysis](#), 28 January 2020

2. LGBT+

There are no official data on sexual orientation of MPs. *PinkNews*, a UK-based online newspaper marketed to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, identified 46 openly LGBT+ MPs elected at the 2019 General Election. This was one fewer than their figure for 2017 and an increase of five from the 2015 General Election.

Of those 46 LGBT+ MPs, 20 were Conservative, 15 Labour, 10 SNP and 1 Liberal Democrat. Of the main parties, the SNP had the highest proportion of LGBT+ MPs (21%). The proportion for Labour was 7% and 6% for the Conservative.

Chart 2. LGBT+ MPs by party
2017 & 2019 General Elections (3 largest parties)



Sources:

Pink News, [The UK just elected a record number of LGBTQ people to Parliament](#), 9 June 2017

Patrick Kelleher, [Gay former Tory candidate suggests there are 'almost' too many queer people in parliament](#), Pink News, 10 January 2020

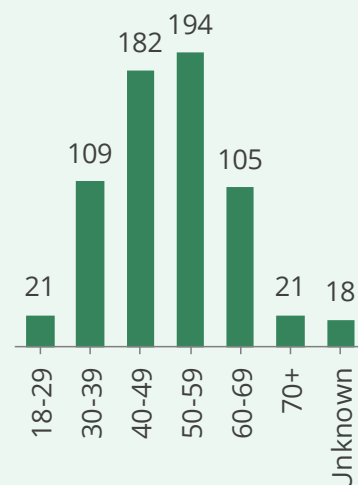
3. Age

In the period from 1979 to 2019, the average age of MPs at elections has been consistently around 50 years. In 1997, the average age was 49.6 years. This rose to 51.2 in 2005. In 2010, the average dropped again to 49.9, but by 2017 it has risen again to 51.1 and remained similar after the 2019 General Election at 51.0.

In 2019, 49% of MPs were aged over 50. Members aged 18-29 and those over 70 each represented 3% of the total. As at March 2020, verified information about age was not yet available for 101 MPs mostly those first elected at the 2019 General Election. Age data for 83 of these Members has been gathered from a variety of public sources. For this reason, **data for 2019 should be considered provisional**.

In 2017, 53% (344) of those elected were aged over 50. This is similar to 2015, and slightly higher than 2010 where 331 MPs (51% were older than 50). However, the peak was 2005, where 363 out of 646 MPs (56%) were over 50. In 1987, only 282 MPs were over 50 (43% of MPs). The proportion of MPs aged 70 and over increased from 2.5% (16) in 2010 to 4.3% (28) in 2017 – the highest share since 1979. The last three elections have seen the largest percentages of MPs under 30 since 1979 (2.3% in 2010, and 2% in 2015 and 2017).

Chart 3. Ages of MPs at the 2019 General Election



3. Ages^a of MPs elected at General Elections, 1979-2019

Election	Average age at election (Years)	Average age at election (Years)						Not known	Total
		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+		
1979	49.6	6	120	205	203	87	14	635	
1983	48.8	10	120	223	201	86	9	649	
1987	49.0	4	112	252	197	79	6	650	
1992	50.0	1	82	259	211	95	3	651	
1997	49.3	10	92	255	225	69	8	659	
2001	50.3	4	79	236	247	83	10	659	
2005	51.2	3	89	191	249	100	14	646	
2010	49.9	14	112	193	218	98	15	650	
2015	50.6	15	92	209	214	98	22	650	
2017	51.1	13	104	189	201	115	28	650	
2019 prov.	51.0	21	109	182	194	105	21	18	650

Notes:

- As of March 2020, verified information about age was not available for 101 MPs mostly those first elected at the 2019 General Election. Age data for 83 Members has been gathered from a variety of public sources.

Source: House of Commons Library, Members' Names Information Service; House of Commons Library research

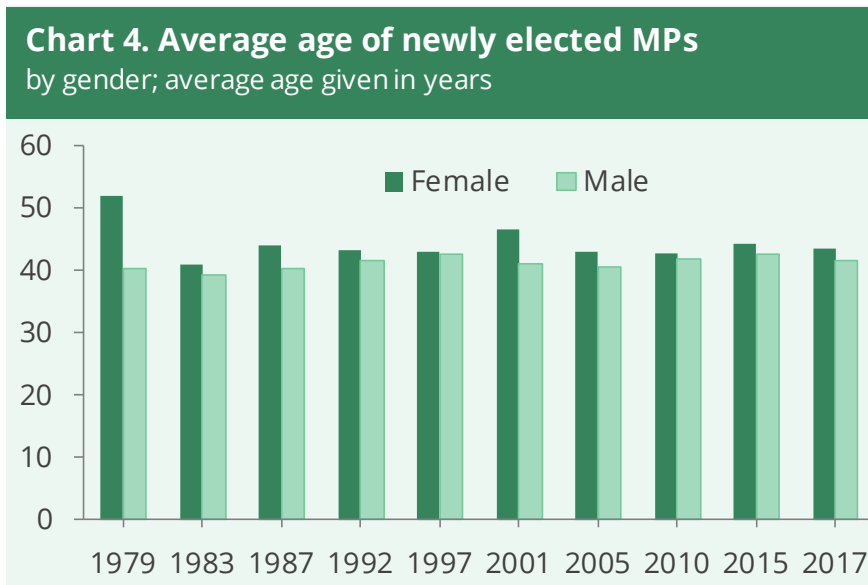
Based on available data for 2019, the Labour has a higher proportion of MPs over the age of 60 than other parties. 26% of Labour MPs are aged over 60 compared to 17% of Scottish National Party MPs, 16% of Conservatives, and 9% of Liberal Democrats.

4. Age ^{a,b} of MPs elected at the 2019 General Election by party								
	Total MPs	Age group						Age unknown
		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	
CON	365	3%	16%	30%	31%	13%	3%	4%
LAB	202	3%	16%	25%	28%	21%	4%	2%
SNP	47	6%	19%	28%	28%	15%	2%	2%
LD	11	0%	18%	36%	36%	9%	0%	0%
Other^c	25	8%	20%	20%	24%	28%	0%	0%
Total	650	3%	17%	28%	30%	16%	3%	3%

Notes: a – as in table 3 above
 b. Includes the Speaker

Source: House of Commons Library, Members’ Names Information Service; House of Commons Library research

Between 1979 and 2017, the average age of first-time MPs varied between a low of 39 years in the 1983 election and a high of 43 years in the 1997 and 2015 elections. In the 2017 election, the average age of newly elected Members was 42 years.¹ Apart from 1997, the average age of first-time women MPs has remained higher than men, as demonstrated in chart 4 below:



Source: House of Commons Library, *Members’ Names Information Service*; as above, a small number of birth dates have been found from other public sources.

Note: Comparable data for 2019 is currently unavailable, please see note to table 3

¹ House of Commons Library, *Members’ Names Information Service*. For a small number of MPs, MNIS does not contain an exact date of birth so some dates of birth have been based on other publicly available sources.

4. Ethnicity

There is no official data on ethnicity of MPs. As an individual's ethnicity is self-defined, it is hard to obtain reliable data on MPs' ethnicity in the absence such data being compiled officially, particularly historically. It is generally stated that the first non-white MPs since 1945 were elected in 1987, when four Labour MPs were from a non-white background.²

According to analysis from British Future, a migration and integration thinktank, 65 non-white MPs were elected at the 2019 General Election, This represents 10% of all MPs and is the highest number and proportion of ethnic minority MPs returned at a general election to date.³ By contrast, it is estimated that around 15% of the UK population is from a black and minority ethnic group.⁴

5. Black and Minority Ethnic MPs elected at General Elections

	Number					Total	% of all MPs by party					Total
	LAB	CON	LD	SNP	Other		LAB	CON	LD	SNP	Other	
1987	4	0	0	0	0	4	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
1992	5	1	0	0	0	6	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
1997	9	0	0	0	0	9	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
2001	12	0	0	0	0	12	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
2005	13	2	0	0	0	15	4%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
2010	16	11	0	0	0	27	6%	4%	0%	0%	0%	4%
2015	23	17	0	1	0	41	10%	5%	0%	2%	0%	6%
2017	32	19	1	0	0	52	12%	6%	8%	0%	0%	8%
2019	41	22	2	0	0	65	20%	6%	18%	0%	0%	10%

Sources: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2006*
 House of Commons Library, CBP7186 General Election 2015
 British Future, '[52 minority MPs to sit in 'most diverse UK Parliament ever'](#)', 9 June 2017,
 British Future, '[Diversity Milestone' as one in ten now from an ethnic minority background](#)', 13 December 2019

Between 1987 and 2019, Labour had the highest number and proportion of non-white MPs. Of the 65 BME MPs elected in 2019, 63% were Labour.

The first BME MP elected at a post war General Election for a party other than Labour and the Conservatives was Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, who was elected for the SNP in Ochil and South Perthshire in 2015. She did not retain her seat in 2017.

The Liberal Democrats gained one female ethnic minority MP, Layla Moran. She is the first non-white Liberal Democrat to be elected at a general election (Parmjit Singh Gill was elected for the Liberal

² For example, see the blog by British Future, [The class of 2015 enter Britain's most diverse ever parliament](#) (8 May 2015). There were a small number of 19th century non-white MPs, as explained on the Parliament website, [Pioneers: The First Asian and Black MPs](#), accessed 3 September 2019.

³ British Future, 'Diversity Milestone' as one in ten now from an ethnic minority background, 13 December 2019

⁴ NOMIS, [Annual Population Survey](#), October 2018 to September 2019 dataset

Democrats at a 2004 by-election but did not retain the seat in the 2005 General Election).

5. Parliamentary experience

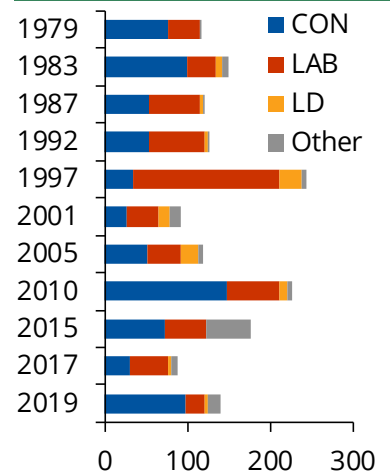
Most recently in 2019, there were 140 MPs elected for the first time. 27% of Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs were new to Parliament followed by 14% of Labour MPs.

Table 9 shows the number of MPs new to the House of Commons at general elections since 1979. At the 1997 and 2010 elections, over a third of MPs elected were new to the House. The high turnover of MPs on these occasions is attributable not only to the change of government but also the number of MPs from the previous Parliament who did not seek re-election. In 1997, 117 MPs stood down and in 2010, 149 MPs chose not to stand.⁵

Historically, a record number of first-time MPs was elected in the 1945 General Election. 324 out of 640 MPs (51%) had no prior experience of the House of Commons.⁶

At three general elections since 1979 the SNP has had the largest proportion of new Members of Parliament. 88% or 49 the total 59 SNP MPs elected at the 2015 General Election were new to Parliament. This is the highest proportion of new MPs recorded by any party since 1979.

Chart 5.
Number of new MPs



6. MPs entering House of Commons for first time at general elections

	New MPs ^a						% of MPs who are new ^a					
	CON	LAB	LD ²	SNP	Other	Total	CON	LAB	LD ²	SNP	Other	Total
1979	77	37	0	0	2	116	23%	14%	0%	0%	13%	18%
1983	100	34	7	0	9	150	25%	16%	30%	0%	47%	23%
1987	53	62	3	1	2	121	14%	27%	14%	33%	10%	19%
1992	54	66	4	0	3	127	16%	24%	20%	0%	14%	20%
1997	33	178	26	2	4	243	20%	43%	57%	33%	17%	37%
2001	26	38	14	4	10	92	16%	9%	27%	80%	42%	14%
2005	51	41	20	2	5	119	26%	12%	32%	33%	20%	18%
2010	147	63	10	1	6	227	48%	24%	18%	17%	26%	35%
2015	73	50	0	49	5	177	22%	22%	0%	88%	68%	27%
2017	30	46	4	1	6	87	9%	18%	33%	3%	25%	13%
2019	97	24	3	9	7	140	27%	14%	27%	19%	14%	22%

Notes

a. Excludes former MPs returning to the House of Commons after time away from Parliament.

b. Liberal Democrat includes predecessor parties.

Sources: House of Commons Library, *Members Names Information Service*

⁵ David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*; House of Commons Library Research Paper RP10/36, *General Election 2010*

⁶ J.F.S. Ross, *Elections and Electors*, 1955, p387

At the start of the 2019 Parliament, Sir Peter Bottomley had the longest length of service (44.5 years excluding dissolution periods) and was first elected in 1975. He is designated the Father of the House. Sir Peter is followed by Margaret Beckett (41.1 years) first elected in 1974, and Barry Sheerman (40.6) first elected in 1979. Although Margaret Beckett was first elected earlier than Peter Bottomley, she had a break in service between 1979 and 1983.

Since 1979, the shortest service was by MPs who won by-elections; two Members subsequently died: Bobby Sands (Fermanagh & South Tyrone) 26 days after election and Mike Carr (Bootle) after 57 days. Ossie O'Brien (Darlington) was elected at a by-election but defeated 77 days later at the 1983 General Election.

7. The 20 Longest-serving^a MPs

As at 2019 General Election

Name of MP:	Days in service ^a	Years in service ^a	First started	Party in 2017 GE
Peter Bottomley	16,240	44.5	1975	CON
Margaret Beckett	15,001	41.1	1974	LAB
Barry Sheerman	14,833	40.6	1979	LAB
Harriet Harman	13,559	37.1	1982	LAB
David Amess	13,335	36.5	1983	CON
Nicholas Brown	13,335	36.5	1983	LAB
Jeremy Corbyn	13,335	36.5	1983	LAB
Roger Gale	13,335	36.5	1983	CON
Edward Leigh	13,335	36.5	1983	CON
William Cash	13,006	35.6	1984	CON
George Howarth	12,082	33.1	1986	LAB
Diane Abbott	11,872	32.5	1987	LAB
John Redwood	11,872	32.5	1987	CON
David Davis	11,850	32.4	1987	CON
Greg Knight	11,837	32.4	1983	CON
Tony Lloyd	11,645	31.9	1983	LAB
Christopher Chope	11,487	31.4	1983	CON
David Evennett	10,409	28.5	1983	CON
Andrew Mitchell	10,374	28.4	1987	CON
John Spellar	10,332	28.3	1982	LAB

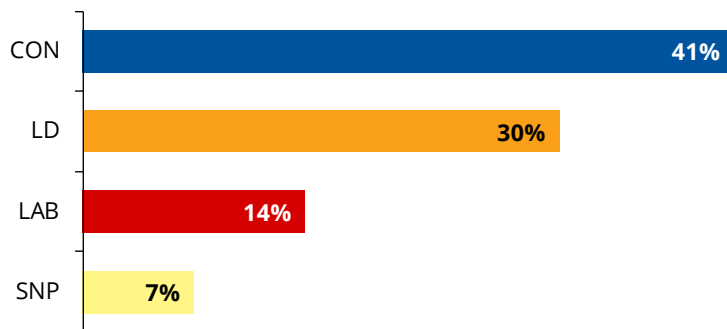
Notes: a. 'Years in service' does not include the Parliament dissolution periods and is estimated as at the dissolution of the 2017-19 Parliament. Members who served the same number of days are ordered by surname.

Source: House of Commons Library, *Members Names Information Service*

6. Education

According to data from the Sutton Trust, Conservative MPs elected at the 2019 General Election were the most likely to have attended a fee-paying school: 41% compared to 30% Liberal Democrat, 14% Labour and 7% SNP.

Chart 6. Share of MPs educated in fee-paying schools by party
MPs elected at the 2019 General Election



The Sutton Trust, Rebecca Montacute, [A Comprehensive Victory](#), 18 December 2019

The *British General Election of...* series of books analyse the education of candidates and MPs at each election.⁷ This publication is not yet available for the 2019 General Election. Information in this section will be updated once it is published.

82% of MPs elected at the 2017 General Election were graduates and 24% attended Oxford or Cambridge. 29% of MPs attended fee-paying schools, a 1% point decrease compared to 2015.⁸ The Conservatives were also more likely to be Oxford or Cambridge graduates (34%). SNP MPs were least likely to have attended a private or selective school (88% attended a comprehensive school). None of the SNP MPs attended Oxford or Cambridge.

⁷ P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh et al, *The British General Election of 2017 & previous editions*.

⁸ Rosie Campbell and Jennifer Hudson, 'Political Recruitment Under Pressure: MPs and Candidates', in P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), *The British General Election of 2017, 2018*

Table 9 and charts 7 to 9 below show how MPs' educational background has changed between 1979 and 2017.

9. Education of MPs elected in General Elections 1979 to 2017

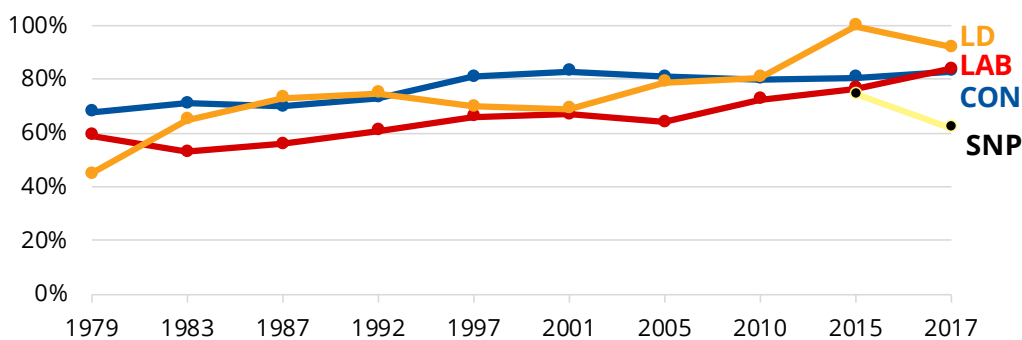
Four main parties, % attending educational institution

		1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017
CON	Fee-paying school	73%	70%	68%	62%	66%	64%	60%	54%	50%	44%
	University	68%	71%	70%	73%	81%	83%	81%	80%	81%	83%
	<i>Oxford / Cambridge</i>	49%	48%	44%	45%	51%	48%	43%	34%	30%	34%
LAB	Fee-paying school	18%	14%	14%	15%	16%	17%	18%	14%	16%	13%
	University	59%	53%	56%	61%	66%	67%	64%	72%	77%	84%
	<i>Oxford / Cambridge</i>	21%	15%	15%	16%	15%	16%	16%	17%	21%	20%
LD	Fee-paying school	55%	52%	45%	50%	41%	35%	39%	39%	13%	30%
	University	45%	65%	73%	75%	70%	69%	79%	81%	100%	92%
	<i>Oxford / Cambridge</i>	27%	30%	27%	30%	33%	27%	31%	28%	13%	17%
SNP	Fee-paying school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7%	6%
	University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	75%	62%
	<i>Oxford / Cambridge</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0%	0%

Source: Cowley, Kavanagh, The British General Election of 2017 & earlier editions. Data for the SNP is not available for the period before 2015.

2017 was the first time when Labour had (a slightly) higher proportion of university graduates than the Conservatives, but the Liberal Democrats have had the highest proportion of graduates since 2010. The share of university-educated Labour MPs increased from 59% in 1979 to 84% in 2017. The proportion of Conservative MPs rose from 68% to 83%. The Liberal Democrats saw an increase from 45% in 1979 to 92% in 2017. The share of SNP MPs with university degrees decreased from 75% in 2015 to 62% in 2017.

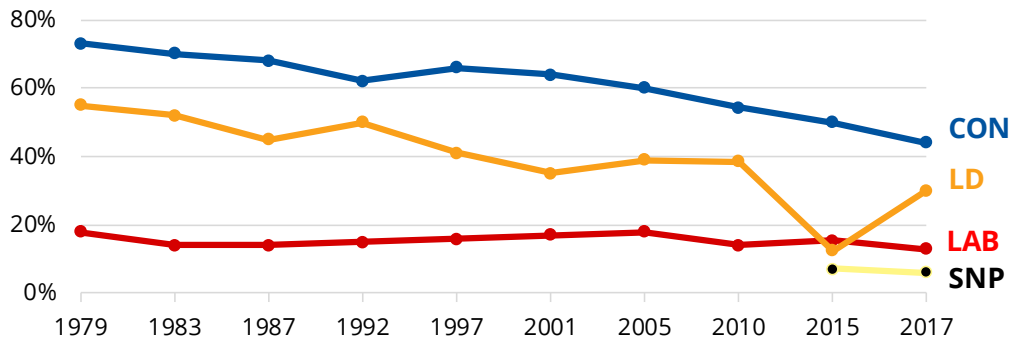
Chart 7. MPs who graduated from university by party



Source: Cowley, Kavanagh, The British General Election of 2017 & earlier editions

The share of MPs who attended fee-paying schools has decreased since 1979. The proportion of Conservative MPs decreased the most, from 73% to 44% in 2017. The Liberal Democrat share fell from 55% to 30% and Labour from 18% to 13%.

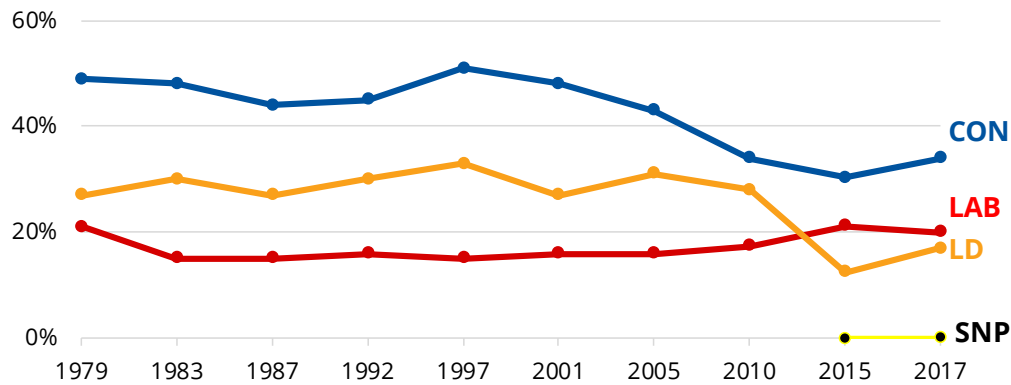
Chart 8. MPs who attended fee-paying schools by party



Source: Cowley, Kavanagh, The British General Election of 2017 & earlier editions

The proportion of Oxford and Cambridge graduates has decreased. In 1979, 225 Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs had been to Oxford or Cambridge, representing 36% of these MPs. Around 23% of MPs elected at the 2017 election had an Oxbridge background.

Chart 9. MPs who graduated from Oxford or Cambridge by party



Source: Cowley, Kavanagh, The British General Election of 2017 & earlier editions

7. Occupation

No official data is available on the occupational background of MPs. The *British General Election of...* series however have analysed the occupations of candidates and MPs at each election in recent decades.⁹ This publication is not yet available for the 2019 General Election. Information in this section will be updated once it is published.

The historic data is restricted to Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, but gives a reasonably consistent guide to the occupational background of MPs over the period from 1979-2010.¹⁰ The 2015 data also includes Scottish National Party MPs. Table 10 summarises the main occupation groups of MPs elected up to 2015.

10. MPs' occupations 1979 to 2015									
Number of MPs (Conservative/Labour/Liberal Democrat/Scottish National ¹)									
	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015 ¹
Professions	278	278	262	258	272	270	242	218	194
Barrister	67	69	57	53	36	33	34	38	38
Solicitor	29	35	31	30	28	35	38	48	51
Doctor	8	5	5	6	9	8	6	9	10
Civil service/local govt	30	27	22	26	37	35	28	18	16
Teachers: University/college	28	32	36	45	61	53	44	25	16
Teacher: school	49	43	48	57	65	64	47	24	16
Business	138	162	161	152	113	107	118	156	192
Miscellaneous	106	115	133	154	188	200	217	222	221
White Collar	9	21	27	46	72	76	78	84	71
Politician/Political organiser	21	20	34	46	60	66	87	90	107
Publisher/Journalist	46	45	42	44	47	50	43	38	34
Farmer	23	21	19	12	7	6	8	10	7
Manual Workers	98	74	73	63	56	53	38	25	19
Miner	21	20	17	13	13	12	11	7	[7 ²]
Total	619	629	629	627	629	630	615	621	626
<i>Percentage</i>									
Professions	44.9%	44.2%	41.7%	41.1%	43.2%	42.9%	39.3%	35.1%	31.0%
Barrister	10.8%	11.0%	9.1%	8.5%	5.7%	5.2%	5.5%	6.1%	6.1%
Solicitor	4.7%	5.6%	4.9%	4.8%	4.5%	5.6%	6.2%	7.7%	8.1%
Doctor	1.3%	0.8%	0.8%	1.0%	1.4%	1.3%	1.0%	1.4%	1.6%
Civil service/local govt	4.8%	4.3%	3.5%	4.1%	5.9%	5.6%	4.6%	2.9%	2.6%
Teachers: University/college	4.5%	5.1%	5.7%	7.2%	9.7%	8.4%	7.2%	4.0%	2.6%
Teacher: school	7.9%	6.8%	7.6%	9.1%	10.3%	10.2%	7.6%	3.9%	2.6%
Business	22.3%	25.8%	25.6%	24.2%	18.0%	17.0%	19.2%	25.1%	30.7%
Miscellaneous	17.1%	18.3%	21.1%	24.6%	29.9%	31.7%	35.3%	35.7%	35.3%
White Collar ³	1.5%	3.3%	4.3%	7.3%	11.4%	12.1%	12.7%	13.5%	11.3%
Politician/Political organiser	3.4%	3.2%	5.4%	7.3%	9.5%	10.5%	14.1%	14.5%	17.1%
Publisher/Journalist	7.4%	7.2%	6.7%	7.0%	7.5%	7.9%	7.0%	6.1%	5.4%
Farmer	3.7%	3.3%	3.0%	1.9%	1.1%	1.0%	1.3%	1.6%	1.1%
Manual Workers	15.8%	11.8%	11.6%	10.0%	8.9%	8.4%	6.2%	4.0%	3.0%
Miner	3.4%	3.2%	2.7%	2.1%	2.1%	1.9%	1.8%	1.1%	[1.1%]

Notes: 1. Scottish National Party data is only included from 2015;
 2. The number of former miners is not recorded in the *British General Election of 2015*. The number for 2015 based on the House of Commons Library calculations.
 3. From 2010, Nuffield study categories: 'White collar' includes: misc. white collar; union official; public relations; and charity/voluntary sector;

Sources: P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), *The British General Election of 2017 & earlier editions*

⁹ P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh et al, *The British General Election of 2015 & previous editions*.

¹⁰ In the period from 1951 to 2010 on average 97% of all elected MPs represented Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties (including predecessors).

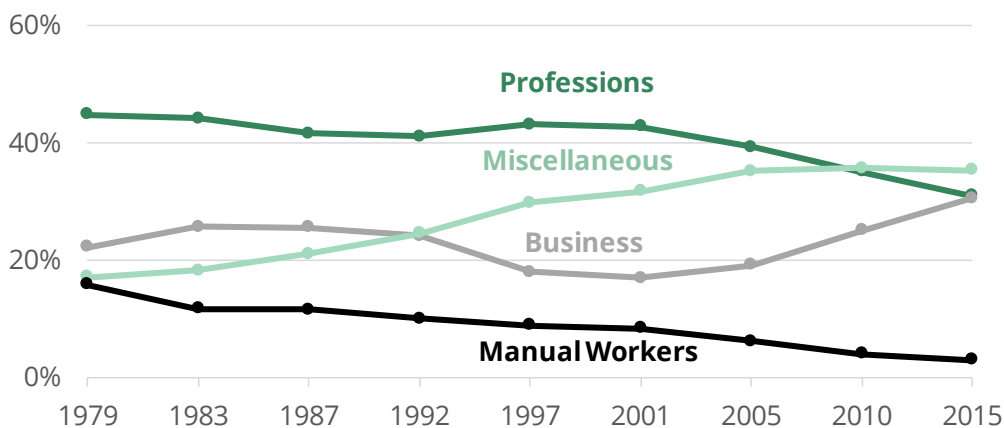
The latest data for 2017 was published in a different format and is not comparable with earlier years: this data is presented in table 11 below.

The number of MPs who were former manual workers decreased from around 16% of all MPs in 1979 to 3% in 2015. The proportion of MPs with a background in one of the ‘traditional’ professions¹¹ has also fallen, from 45% in 1979 to 31% in 2015. Within this category the proportion of former school teachers and former barristers has declined while the proportion of former solicitors has risen. The numbers of teachers from schools and teachers from universities and colleges were rising until 1997. In the period from 2001 to 2015 it fell below the 1979 level.

As the established professions have declined they have been replaced by MPs from other non-manual occupations. Particularly notable is the growth in the number of new MPs with previous political experience. In 1979 3% of MPs from the main parties were previously politicians/political organisers, compared to 17% in 2015.

MPs with a background in business tend to be Conservative. The decline in their number was reversed in 2005 so that in 2015 they formed a quarter of the main parties’ MPs.

Chart 10. MPs' occupations



Sources: Kavanagh, Cowley et al, The British General Election of 2015 & previous editions

Table 11 shows MPs’ occupation **immediately before** the 2017 General Election. Campbell and Hudson, who compiled these figures, do not include earlier or first employment.¹²

Half of Labour MPs (49%) had “instrumental” (i.e. political)¹³ roles immediately before being elected. This is higher than the SNP (37%), the Conservatives (31%) and Liberal Democrats (25%).

¹¹ The ‘traditional’ professions category is listed in Bryon Criddle, ‘Variable Diversity: MPs and Candidates’, in P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), *The British General Election of 2015*, 2016, p357

¹² The authors acknowledge the latter can also be used as an alternative indicator of occupational class

¹³ The authors describe “instrumental” occupations as narrowly political roles. The jobs envisaged are set out in table 11.

Conservatives had the highest proportion of MPs with a business/commerce background (41%), followed by 33% of Liberal Democrats, 17% SNP and just 6% Labour.

Just under one-fifth of SNP (20%), Labour (19%), Conservative (17%) and one third of Liberal Democrat (33%) MPs were in “brokerage”¹⁴ occupations prior to the 2017 General Election.

11. MPs' occupations immediately prior to the 2017 General Election								
	CON	LAB	SNP	LD	CON	LAB	SNP	LD
Brokerage	55	50	7	4	17.4%	19.1%	20.0%	33.3%
Legal profession	38	25	1	2	12.0%	9.5%	2.9%	16.7%
Education	6	20	3	2	1.9%	7.6%	8.6%	16.7%
Physicians/dentists	7	3	2	--	2.2%	1.1%	5.7%	--
Architects/surveyors/engineers	4	2	1	--	1.3%	0.8%	2.9%	--
Instrumental	101	129	13	3	31.9%	49.2%	37.1%	25.0%
Councillor/other elected office	28	47	5	2	8.8%	17.9%	14.3%	16.7%
Political/social/policy research	30	27	5	--	9.5%	10.3%	14.3%	--
Party official	14	14	2	--	4.4%	5.3%	5.7%	--
Journalism/broadcast/media	10	6	1	1	3.2%	2.3%	2.9%	8.3%
Trade union official	--	30	--	--	--	11.5%	--	--
Lobbyist	19	5	--	--	6.0%	1.9%	--	--
Business/commerce	130	15	6	4	41.0%	5.7%	17.1%	33.3%
Other	29	64	8	1	9.1%	24.4%	22.9%	8.3%
Agriculture/farmers	6	--	--	--	1.9%	--	--	--
Armed forces	2	2	--	--	0.6%	0.8%	--	--
Civil service/local authority	5	3	1	--	1.6%	1.1%	2.9%	--
Clergy	--	1	--	--	--	0.4%	--	--
NHS	2	7	--	--	0.6%	2.7%	--	--
Other	--	4	2	1	--	1.5%	5.7%	8.3%
Other white collar	6	8	2	--	1.9%	3.1%	5.7%	--
Retired	2	--	1	--	0.6%	--	2.9%	--
Social worker	--	5	--	--	--	1.9%	--	--
Voluntary sector	5	32	2	--	1.6%	12.2%	5.7%	--
Writer/literary/artist	1	2	--	--	0.3%	0.8%	--	--
Manual	2	4	1	--	0.6%	1.5%	2.9%	--
Total	317	262	35	12	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Rosie Campbell and Jennifer Hudson, 'Political Recruitment Under Pressure: MPs and Candidates', in P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), *The British General Election of 2017*, 2018

¹⁴ The authors define “brokerage” occupations as those which are not overtly political but provide skills relevant for a political career. The professions included are set out in table 11.

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@Parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@Parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their Parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).