



Library Note

House of Lords: Party and Group Strengths and Voting

The relative size of the political parties in the House of Lords has been a subject of interest for many years. The implementation of the House of Lords Act 1999 removed the majority of hereditary peers from the House and represented a major change in its composition. The overall size of the House of Lords (as defined as those Members eligible to sit) has risen from 690, following reform in 1999–2000, to 807 at the end of the 2015–16 session. During this time no one party or group has held a majority. Nevertheless, the relative sizes of the parties and groups has changed over time with the appointments made to the House by successive Prime Ministers.

Charts 1 and 2 illustrate the composition of the House prior to reform in 1998–99 and as it stood at the end of the 2015–16 session.

Chart 1: Composition of the House by Party/Group (Percentage of the Whole House), 1998–99

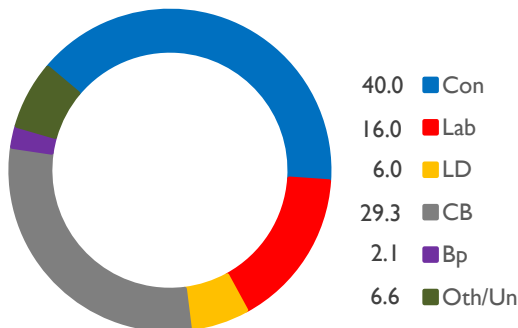
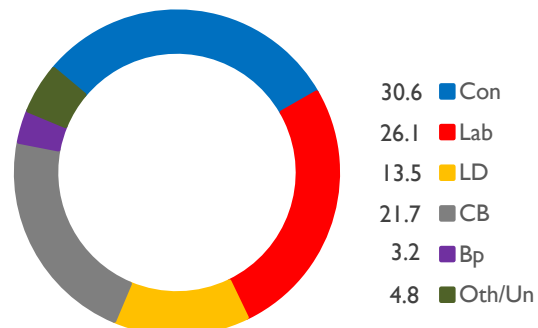


Chart 2: Composition of the House by Party/Group (Percentage of the Whole House), 2015–16



Membership data in the House of Lords is available since the 1984–85 session. As a percentage of the whole House, the Conservative Party has been the largest party group since the 2013–14 session (currently 30.6 percent). In contrast, the Labour Party currently constitutes 26.1 percent of the House, 4 percentage points lower than their peak of 30.1 percent in the 2008–09 session. The Liberal Democrats are currently at their highest percentage of the whole House since 1984–85, at 13.5 percent, whilst the Crossbenchers are at their lowest, at 21.7 percent. In terms of division participation, the average number of Members voting per division was 365 in the 2015–16 session. The Government was defeated in 53.1 percent of divisions in 2015–16, the highest percentage since 2004–05, and the second highest since 1984–85. This Lords Library briefing will be updated following the end of each parliamentary session.

Charley Coleman
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Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Composition of the House of Lords: In Brief 1
- 3. Statistics 3
- 4. Key Findings from the Tables 15
- 5. Issues to Consider: Political Dynamics in the House of Lords 19
- 6. Further Analysis on Voting Patterns 22
- 7. Select Bibliography 25

1. Introduction

This Library briefing provides background information on the issue of party strengths and composition in the House of Lords by presenting a range of statistics about membership and voting. A summary of the main findings drawn from these tables can be found in section 4.

It should be noted that these statistics cannot in themselves offer a comprehensive analysis of the political dynamics of the House of Lords, as consistent data are available in some instances only for recent years, and tend to be averages and therefore only indicative of wider political factors. They cannot take into account the unique circumstances, for example, of a particular vote or strength of support for a party at a particular moment in time. Members of the House of Lords are arguably subject to fewer behavioural restraints than MPs (see section 5), and regardless of party allegiances—and past voting patterns—future votes may be changed by circumstance and the individual decisions of Members. Therefore, any assessment that approaches the subject of party strengths in the House of Lords, particularly the notion of government majorities in the Lords, should take into account some of the distinctive features of the Chamber. Section 5 of this briefing, therefore, provides some context to the statistics. Section 6 and the select bibliography highlight further reading and analysis of these issues.

It should be stressed that this briefing offers no judgement on the merits of the arguments expressed by the various commentators, or by the political parties themselves on the reasons behind the patterns in the data, but seeks to provide background information on this complex and often controversial subject.

2. Composition of the House of Lords: In Brief

While governments are generally formed on the basis of a majority following elections to the House of Commons, they do not necessarily enjoy an overall numerical majority in the House of Lords. As a result, either to a greater or lesser extent, they often rely on convention rather than voting strength to progress their legislative programmes through the second chamber.¹ Further interest in this issue arises because of a lack of a government majority in the House of Lords has meant a greater tendency to see government defeats. Meg Russell and Maria Sciarra state:

Government defeats in the House of Commons are rare, and never go unnoticed. House of Lords defeats are also only occasionally brought to public attention. Yet the government is defeated frequently in the House of Lords [...]²

Under the Conservative Government between 1979 and 1997, it was often said that the Conservatives so significantly outnumbered members of the other parties in the House of Lords that they had an ‘inbuilt’ majority with an average of 46 percent of the House overall. However, defeats could be, and were, achieved through alliances between the opposition parties and Crossbenchers; on occasion opposition also included members of the governing party.³

¹ House of Lords Library, [The Salisbury Doctrine](#), 30 June 2006; and [The Salisbury-Addison Convention](#), 27 May 2015.

² Meg Russell and Maria Sciarra, ‘Why Does the Government get Defeated in the House of Lords? The Lords, the Party System and British Politics’, *British Politics*, 2007, vol 2, p 299.

³ See for example, on 28 June 1984, the Government was defeated on a cross-party amendment tabled to the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill ([HL Hansard cols 1070–1](#)). For further information see: Nicholas Baldwin, *Papers in Politics: The House of Lords*, 1990, p 15.

Under Labour between 1997 and 2010, the balance between the two larger parties over time became more equal, with the removal of the majority of hereditary Peers from the House in 1999 (many, but not all, of whom were Conservative), and the appointment of greater numbers of Labour life Peers than Conservative or Liberal Democrat. The 2010–15 Coalition Government, including both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, resulted in a government majority in the House of Lords. On average, the Labour Governments were defeated in 32.6 percent of whipped divisions between 1997–98 and 2009–10. The Coalition were defeated in an average of 23.2 percent of whipped divisions between 2010–12 and 2014–15.

Most recently, the May 2015 general election increased the disparity in political composition between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The two most notable differences concerned the representation of the Liberal Democrats in the Commons (from 57 seats to 8)⁴ and the Scottish National Party (SNP), who increased from 6 seats to 56 after the 2015 general election. In the Lords, there were 103 Liberal Democrat Members eligible to take their seat at the end of the 2014–15 session (at the end of the 2015–16 session this stood at 109). The SNP has expressed its opposition to the appointment system of the House of Lords, as presently established, and to date has not accepted peerages for its members.⁵

The largely appointed nature of the House has created a chamber where changes in composition happen more gradually than in the Commons and where the House of Lords can have very different composition to that of the Commons. In the *Coalition Agreement*, the Coalition Government stated in its policy would be that:

Lords appointments will be made with the objective of creating a second chamber that is reflective of the share of the vote secured by the political parties in the last general election.⁶

This aim was criticised by UCL’s Constitution Unit in its report [House Full: Time to Get a Grip on Lords Appointments](#), published in April 2011, in which the authors wrote:

There are particular concerns about the Coalition’s stated objective of achieving proportionality between the parties in the House of Lords in relation to general election vote shares [...] putting this promise into effect would require a minimum of 269 additional peers to be appointed, taking the size of the chamber to 1062.⁷

However, this was a policy established in tandem with a proposed plan for House of Lords reform, with a move towards a wholly or largely elected chamber envisaged by the then government. The House of Lords Reform Bill did not progress beyond second reading in the House of Commons before it was withdrawn.⁸

It is worth noting that voluntary retirement from the House of Lords was placed upon a statutory basis by the House of Lords Reform Act 2014. In effect, this replaced the non-statutory voluntary retirement scheme in place since 2011. Members can retire under the 2014 Act by giving written notice to the Clerk of the Parliaments specifying a date upon which they want to retire. From that date onward, Members are no longer able to participate in House of

⁴ Now nine MPs following the Richmond Park by-election on 1 December 2016.

⁵ *Highland Times*, ‘Peerages “Embarrassment on International Scale”’, 23 October 2014.

⁶ HM Government, *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, May 2010, p 27.

⁷ Meg Russell, [House Full: Time to Get A Grip on Lords Appointments](#), April 2011, p 3.

⁸ [House of Lords Reform Bill \[HL\], HL Bill 52 of session 2013–14](#).

Lords proceedings. Such retirement is permanent and cannot be rescinded. At this time it is unclear what impact this might have on overall attendance rates.⁹ As at 1 March 2017, 65 Members have retired from the House.¹⁰ The party breakdown of these retirements was as follows: 23 Crossbench, 21 Conservative, 9 Liberal Democrat, 5 Labour, 4 Other and 3 Non-Affiliated.

3. Statistics

A Note on Available Sources of Data

It is important to note that the method by which the House has recorded statistics on its membership—and on voting records in divisions—has changed over time. As a result not all the tables presented in this Library briefing cover the same time periods.

This briefing utilises data from a number of sources produced by the House of Lords Journal Office, including:

- *Statistics on Business and Membership*. A sessional publication produced at the end of each parliamentary session.¹¹
- *Members' Voting Records by Party or Group*. A sessional publication produced at the end of each parliamentary session.¹²

Where it has been necessary to use two different data sources in a given table, the table's sources and notes field make this clear.

It should be noted that the figures provided are indicative. These figures do not necessarily reflect the results of any given vote or provide a prediction of how future votes will unfold—the uniqueness of each vote is discussed in section 5. The calculated figures include:

- Those Members who took a whip but did not vote that session—who are included because it is not possible to calculate those who purposely abstained and so forth.
- Those who were able to have voted but ceased to be a Member at a point in the session—for example retired or died.

The figures also include, with regard to Crossbench Members, any who were officially affiliated as such but by convention do not vote, for example, Law Lords between 2000 and 2009 and paid office holders, such as the Chairman of Committees (now the Senior Deputy Speaker), who have since been categorised in statistics as 'Other' and more recently 'Non-Affiliated'.

An Explanation of the Data Tables

Table I shows the composition of the House since 1984–85 by party/group of those Members able to sit and vote—this excludes Members on leave of absence or disqualified.

⁹ For further information see: House of Lords Library, [Retirement from the House of Lords](#), 13 February 2015.

¹⁰ UK Parliament website, [Retired Members of the House of Lords](#), accessed 1 March 2017.

¹¹ Available from 2007–08 at [House of Lords Sessional Statistics](#), accessed 14 February 2017.

¹² *ibid*, from 2008–09.

Before 1999, Peers may not have received their writ in order to sit (because they were under the age of 21, for example) and so these individuals are also excluded from the total. A consistent series of official figures for party strength has only been maintained since the 1984–85 session. This table uses data from the sessional statistics publication *Statistics on Business and Membership* and provides data as at the end of each session. Therefore, in some cases the number of Bishops listed may be lower than the fixed number of 26. This is because a seat was vacant at the end of the session when the *Statistics on Business and Membership* for that session was collated.

Table 2 shows the composition of the House by party/group (percentage of the whole House), ie as a percentage of its total eligible membership.

These figures are calculated from Table 1, and therefore exclude Members on leave of absence; Members disqualified as senior members of the judiciary (following the establishment of the Supreme Court in 2009); those disqualified as a result of their position as a Member of the European Parliament; and those suspended from the service of the House. The data is provided as at end of session.

Table 3 illustrates the percentage of the House taking a party political whip, and the relative size of the three main political parties in this context. It therefore excludes those Members listed as Crossbench, Bishops, Non-affiliated or Other in Table 1. Percentages are calculated on the basis of the figures in Table 1, and according to the following definitions/caveats:

- Taking a political whip. This represents the total number of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Members as a percentage of the whole House.
- The percentage for each party is that party's membership as a percentage of the total number of Members taking a political whip.

Table 4 shows the number of government defeats each session; the total number of whipped divisions; and the percentage of defeats since 1985–86. A government defeat has been defined as an occasion where a representative of the government is one or both of the tellers for the defeated side.

Table 5 provides additional information about government defeats since 2004–05. It shows the number of government defeats in each session where at least one Member of the governing party/parties voted against the government, and on how many of these occasions the number of these votes equalled or outnumbered the margin of the defeat.

Table 6 presents divisions data for each session since 1998–99. These are based upon voting statistics (available since 1998–99) collated by the House of Lords Journal Office, and in the sessional statistics publication *Members' Voting Records by Party or Group*. This data has then been used to calculate the percentages in the table. A brief guide to these individual statistics is provided below:

- Average percent division participation: this figure presents the total number of whipped divisions that a party or group's Members actually voted in, as a percentage of the total number of whipped divisions their Members were eligible to vote in—in other words the percentage of votes a party or group cast out of the total they could have theoretically cast. Therefore, it represents a basic

measure of the proportion of divisions attended by each party or group. From the 2010–12 session this data is for whipped divisions only.

- **Percent against government:** this figure is the total number of votes cast against the government by a party or group's Members, as a percentage of the total number of whipped divisions their Members voted in.
- **Percent for government:** this figure is the total number of votes cast for the government by a party or group's Members as a percentage of the total number of whipped divisions their Members voted in.
- **Average percent attendance:** this is the total number of attendances recorded for each Member as a percentage of the total number of times they were eligible to attend.

Tables 7 and 8 presents data for the percentage of a party or group's Members who attended 1–10 percent of divisions, 11–20 percent of divisions, and so on, in the 2010–15 Parliament and the 2015–16 session. Percentages are calculated on the basis of the total number of divisions a Member was eligible to vote in. It is based on whipped divisions only.

Table 1: Composition of the House, 1984–85 to 2015–16

End of Session	Conservative			Labour			Liberal/SDP/Liberal Democrat ¹			Crossbench			Bishops		Other/Non-Affiliated			Total Eligible to Sit
	LP	HdP	Total	LP	HdP	Total	LP	HdP	Total	LP	HdP	Total	Total	% WH	LP	HdP	Total	
1984–85	91	314	405	110	13	123	45	39	84	86	134	220	26	2.8	22	57	79	937
1985–86	90	322	412	106	12	118	44	42	86	93	143	236	26	2.7	16	53	69	947
1986–87	90	316	406	105	12	117	44	42	86	91	144	235	26	2.7	31	62	93	963
1987–88	105	321	426	101	12	113	42	38	80	104	133	237	26	2.8	8	42	50	932
1988–89	106	325	431	101	12	113	39	36	75	103	139	242	26	2.8	11	43	54	941
1989–90	113	329	442	100	12	112	37	33	70	104	151	255	26	2.7	10	45	55	960
1990–91	123	328	451	103	13	116	36	33	69	103	150	253	26	2.7	13	53	66	981
1991–92	123	328	451	102	13	115	36	32	68	106	150	256	26	2.6	13	54	67	983
1992–93	143	338	481	104	12	116	31	27	58	112	166	278	26	2.5	8	73	81	1040
1993–94	141	338	479	102	12	114	30	24	54	112	175	287	26	2.5	12	71	83	1043
1994–95	140	336	476	96	13	109	29	23	52	108	181	289	23	2.2	16	72	88	1037
1995–96	141	318	459	96	15	111	32	24	56	118	201	319	26	2.5	22	68	90	1061
1996–97	149	328	477	101	15	116	33	24	57	118	204	322	26	2.4	7	62	69	1067
1997–98	173	305	478	158	18	176	45	24	69	120	202	322	26	2.2	9	86	95	1166
1998–99	174	310	484	174	19	193	49	23	72	129	226	355	26	2.1	11	69	80	1210
1999–00	180	52	232	197	4	201	57	5	62	132	31	163	26	3.8	6	0	6	690
2000–01	173	52	225	191	4	195	56	5	61	131	31	162	26	3.9	6	0	6	675
2001–02	167	50	217	186	4	190	60	5	65	147	32	179	25	3.7	7	0	7	683
2002–03	160	50	210	181	4	185	59	5	64	146	33	179	26	3.9	7	0	7	671
2003–04	155	47	202	197	4	201	64	4	68	152	33	185	26	3.8	9	2	11	693
2004–05	156	49	205	195	4	199	64	5	69	150	31	181	25	3.6	11	2	13	692

Table I: Continued

End of Session	Conservative			Labour			Liberal/SDP/Liberal Democrat ¹			Crossbench			Bishops		Other/Non-Affiliated			Total Eligible to Sit
	LP	HdP	Total	LP	HdP	Total	LP	HdP	Total	LP	HdP	Total	Total	% WH	LP	HdP	Total	
2005–06	160	48	208	208	4	212	73	5	78	168	33	201	26	3.5	11	2	13	738
2006–07	154	48	202	213	4	217	73	5	78	168	33	201	26	3.5	12	2	14	738
2007–08	151	48	199	210	4	214	69	5	74	173	33	206	26	3.5	12	2	14	733
2008–09	141	48	189	208	4	212	66	5	71	150	33	183	26	3.7	21	2	23	704
2009–10	139	46	185	207	4	211	67	5	72	153	33	186	26	3.7	24	2	26	706
2010–12	166	48	214	231	4	235	86	4	90	154	32	186	25	3.2	30	2	32	782
2012–13	163	49	212	218	4	222	85	4	89	150	31	181	25	3.3	32	1	33	762
2013–14	171	49	220	214	4	218	95	4	99	151	30	181	25	3.2	34	1	35	778
2014–15	177	49	226	212	4	216	99	4	103	152	30	182	26	3.3	35	1	36	789
2015–16	198	49	247	207	4	211	105	4	109	143	32	175	26	3.2	38	1	39	807

Notes: LP = Life Peers. HdP = Peers sitting by virtue of a hereditary peerage or those excepted under standing orders 9 and 10. Includes any hereditary Peers of first creation.

Excludes Members on leave of absence, disqualified as senior members of the judiciary, those disqualified as an MEP and those suspended from the service of the House. As at end of session. The number of hereditary Peers is fixed per grouping but numbers can change temporarily due to, for example, moves between these categories, or by Members going on leave of absence. The 2010–12 session was a long session.

¹ This is a combined figure. Until their merger in 1988 the Liberal Party and the SDP were separate. Following the merger in 1988 a number of Peers continued to sit as SDP members. These figures are not provided separately for consistency.

(Source: House of Lords, *Statistics on Business and Membership*, 1984–85 to 2015–16)

Table 2: Composition of the House by Party/Group (as a Percentage of the Whole House) for the Three Largest Parties and the Crossbenchers, 1984–85 to 2015–16

End of Session	As Percentage of Whole House			
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal/SDP/Liberal Democrat ¹	Crossbench
1984–85	43.2	13.1	9.0	23.5
1985–86	43.5	12.5	9.1	24.9
1986–87	42.2	12.1	8.9	24.4
1987–88	45.7	12.1	8.6	25.4
1988–89	45.8	12.0	8.0	25.7
1989–90	46.0	11.7	7.3	26.6
1990–91	46.0	11.8	7.0	25.8
1991–92	45.9	11.7	6.9	26.0
1992–93	46.3	11.2	5.6	26.7
1993–94	45.9	10.9	5.2	27.5
1994–95	45.9	10.5	5.0	27.9
1995–96	43.3	10.5	5.3	30.1
1996–97	44.7	10.9	5.3	30.2
1997–98	41.0	15.1	5.9	27.6
1998–99	40.0	16.0	6.0	29.3
1999–00	33.6	29.1	9.0	23.6
2000–01	33.3	28.9	9.0	24.0
2001–02	31.8	27.8	9.5	26.2
2002–03	31.3	27.6	9.5	26.7
2003–04	29.1	29.0	9.8	26.7
2004–05	29.6	28.8	10.0	26.2
2005–06	28.2	28.7	10.6	27.2
2006–07	27.4	29.4	10.6	27.2
2007–08	27.1	29.2	10.1	28.1
2008–09	26.8	30.1	10.1	26.0
2009–10	26.2	29.9	10.2	26.3
2010–12	27.4	30.1	11.5	23.8
2012–13	27.8	29.1	11.7	23.8
2013–14	28.3	28.0	12.7	23.3
2014–15	28.6	27.4	13.1	23.1
2015–16	30.6	26.1	13.5	21.7

Notes: Excludes Members on leave of absence, disqualified as senior members of the judiciary, those disqualified as an MEP and those suspended from the service of the House. As at end of session. The 2010–12 session was a long session.

¹ This is a combined figure. Until their merger in 1988 the Liberal Party and the SDP were separate. Following the merger in 1988 a number of Peers continued to sit as SDP members. These figures are not provided separately for consistency.

(Source: House of Lords Library; House of Lords, *Statistics on Business and Membership*, 1984–85 to 2015–16)

Table 3: Members Taking a Political Whip, 1984–85 to 2015–16

End of Session	Total Eligible to Sit	Taking a Political Whip ¹		Conservative		Labour		Liberal/SDP/Liberal Democrat ³	
		Total	% WH	Total	% TPW ²	Total	% TPW ²	Total	% TPW ²
1984–85	937	612	65.3	405	66.2	123	20.1	84	13.7
1985–86	947	616	65.0	412	66.9	118	19.2	86	14.0
1986–87	963	609	63.2	406	66.7	117	19.2	86	14.1
1987–88	932	619	66.4	426	68.8	113	18.3	80	12.9
1988–89	941	619	65.7	431	69.6	113	18.3	75	12.1
1989–90	960	624	65.0	442	70.8	112	17.9	70	11.2
1990–91	981	636	64.8	451	70.9	116	18.2	69	10.8
1991–92	983	634	64.4	451	71.1	115	18.1	68	10.7
1992–93	1040	655	62.9	481	73.4	116	17.7	58	8.9
1993–94	1043	647	62.0	479	74.0	114	17.6	54	8.3
1994–95	1037	637	61.4	476	74.7	109	17.1	52	8.2
1995–96	1061	626	59.0	459	73.3	111	17.7	56	8.9
1996–97	1067	650	60.9	477	73.4	116	17.8	57	8.8
1997–98	1166	723	62.0	478	66.1	176	24.3	69	9.5
1998–99	1210	749	61.9	484	64.6	193	25.8	72	9.6
1999–00	690	495	71.7	232	46.9	201	40.6	62	12.5
2000–01	675	481	71.2	225	46.8	195	40.5	61	12.7
2001–02	683	472	69.1	217	46.0	190	40.3	65	13.8
2002–03	671	459	68.4	210	45.8	185	40.3	64	13.9
2003–04	693	471	67.9	202	42.9	201	42.7	68	14.4
2004–05	692	473	68.3	205	43.3	199	42.1	69	14.6
2005–06	738	498	67.4	208	41.8	212	42.6	78	15.7
2006–07	738	497	67.3	202	40.6	217	43.7	78	15.7
2007–08	733	487	66.4	199	40.9	214	43.9	74	15.2
2008–09	704	472	67.0	189	40.0	212	44.9	71	15.0
2009–10	706	468	66.2	185	39.5	211	45.1	72	15.4
2010–12	782	539	68.9	214	39.7	235	43.6	90	16.7
2012–13	762	523	68.6	212	40.5	222	42.4	89	17.0
2013–14	778	537	69.0	220	41.0	218	40.6	99	18.4
2014–15	789	545	69.1	226	41.5	216	39.6	103	18.9
2015–16	807	567	70.3	247	43.6	211	37.2	109	19.2

Notes: Excludes Members on leave of absence, disqualified as senior members of the judiciary, those disqualified as an MEP and those suspended from the service of the House. Excludes some smaller party groups normally classified as 'Other'. As at end of session. The 2010–12 session was a long session.

¹ Taking a political whip. This represents the total number of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Members as a percentage of the whole House.

² The percentage for each party is that party's membership as a percentage of the total number of Members taking a political whip.

³ This is a combined figure. Until their merger in 1988 the Liberal Party and the SDP were separate. Following the merger in 1988 a number of Peers continued to sit as SDP members. These figures are not provided separately for consistency.

(Source: House of Lords Library; House of Lords, *Statistics on Business and Membership*, 1984–85 to 2015–16)

Table 4: Government Defeats, 1985–86 to 2015–16

Session	Total Divisions	Total Number of Whipped Divisions	Number of Government Defeats	Government Defeats as a Percentage of Whipped Divisions	Government of the Day
1985–86	250	237	22	9.3	Conservative
1986–87 ²	80	78	3	3.8	
1987–88 ¹	279	271	17	6.3	
1988–89	189	185	12	6.5	
1989–90	186	180	20	11.1	
1990–91	104	104	17	16.3	
1991–92 ²	83	79	6	7.6	
1992–93 ¹	165	159	19	11.9	
1993–94	136	115	16	13.9	
1994–95	106	101	7	6.9	
1995–96	110	107	10	9.3	
1996–97 ²	67	65	10	15.4	
1997–98 ¹	179	173	39	22.5	Labour
1998–99	99	92	31	33.7	
1999–2000	192	186	36	19.4	
2000–01 ²	40	34	2	5.9	
2001–02 ¹	172	157	56	35.7	
2002–03	226	203	88	43.3	
2003–04	176	161	65	40.4	
2004–05 ²	67	64	37	57.8	
2005–06 ¹	192	186	62	33.3	
2006–07	104	99	45	45.5	
2007–08	125	122	29	23.8	Coalition
2008–09	89	86	25	29.1	
2009–10 ²	43	42	14	33.3	
2010–12 ¹	241	236	48	20.3	
2012–13	82	79	27	34.2	Coalition
2013–14	89	79	14	17.7	
2014–15 ²	60	53	11	20.8	Conservative
2015–16 ¹	113	113	60	53.1	

Notes: A defeat is where a representative of the government is one or both of the tellers for the defeated side

¹ Session after a general election

² Session before a general election

The 2010–12 session was a long session.

(Source: House of Lords Library; House of Lords Information Office; House of Lords, *Statistics on Business and Membership*, 1985–6 to 2015–16; House of Lords Journal Office)

Table 5: Government Defeats Where at Least One Peer Taking Governing Party Whip Voted Against the Government, 2004–05 to 2015–16

Session	Number of Government Defeats	Defeats in Which at Least One Government Party Peer Voted Against Government	Defeats Where These Votes Against Equalled/Outnumbered Margin of Defeat	Government of the Day
2004–05 ²	37	24	0	Labour
2005–06 ¹	62	26	2	
2006–07	45	20	1	
2007–08	29	10	0	
2008–09	25	10	1	
2009–10 ²	14	10	1	
2010–12 ¹	48	41	8	Coalition
2012–13	27	21	5	
2013–14	14	13	3	
2014–15 ²	11	11	3	
2015–16 ¹	60	58	0	Conservative

Notes: A defeat is where a representative of the government is one or both of the tellers for the defeated side

¹ Session after a general election

² Session before a general election

The 2010–12 session was a long session.

(Source: House of Lords Library; House of Lords Information Office; House of Lords Journal Office)

Table 6: Division Participation by Party/Group, 1998–99 to 2015–16

































































































Session	Conservative				Labour				Liberal Democrat				
	Average % Division Participation	% Against Gov	% For Gov	Average % Attendance	Average % Division Participation	% Against Gov	% For Gov	Average % Attendance	Average % Division Participation	% Against Gov	% For Gov	Average % Attendance	
1998–99	N/A	94.46	5.53	N/A	N/A	1.04	98.95	N/A	N/A	54.44	45.55	N/A	
1999–00	 28.8	99.8	0.2	 54.2	 52.1	0.6	99.4	 68.6	 41.3	42.7	57.3	 67.5	Labour
2000–01	 33.3	96.1	3.9	 53.9	 50.4	0.3	99.7	 65.2	 45.0	28.7	71.3	 67.1	
2001–02	 31.6	98.6	1.4	 55.9	 55.0	0.5	99.5	 70.3	 46.4	76.9	23.1	 70.8	
2002–03	 30.8	97.3	2.7	 56.0	 49.6	1.2	98.8	 69.2	 44.1	75.1	24.9	 70.2	
2003–04	 32.6	97.9	2.1	 56.3	 52.5	0.7	99.3	 69.7	 47.5	81.4	18.6	 69.7	
2004–05	 39.2	99.9	0.1	 57.7	 56.7	2.1	97.9	 71.4	 60.0	79.0	21.0	 71.9	
2005–06	 30.2	93.3	6.7	 56.5	 56.6	1.0	99.0	 73.7	 50.4	86.5	13.5	 72.8	
2006–07	 29.4	99.4	0.6	 57.4	 54.0	0.9	99.1	 70.1	 52.9	94.1	5.9	 71.7	
2007–08	 28.4	97.0	3.0	 58.7	 50.3	1.1	98.9	 70.4	 49.4	69.4	30.6	 70.2	
2008–09	 22.6	89.7	10.3	 58.0	 42.7	1.9	98.1	 68.6	 46.2	84.3	15.7	 72.8	
2009–10	 26.6	80.0	20.0	 57.7	 41.8	2.0	98.0	 67.5	 51.9	81.4	18.5	 72.2	
2010–12	 59.0	1.3	98.7	 62.1	 58.0	98.8	1.2	 71.7	 66.4	2.5	97.6	 77.7	Coalition
2012–13	 59.4	1.5	98.5	 62.5	 58.1	98.4	1.6	 73.5	 63.6	13.2	86.8	 76.2	
2013–14	 62.3	0.7	99.3	 63.7	 63.6	98.3	1.7	 74.1	 66.0	4.3	95.7	 77.1	
2014–15	 56.7	1.4	98.6	 60.8	 56.8	99.9	0.1	 70.6	 58.5	6.6	93.4	 73.5	Conservative
2015–16	 66.2	1.3	98.7	 61.6	 43.1	95.7	4.3	 70.7	 60.4	99.6	0.4	 73.5	

Table 6: Continued

Session	Crossbench				Bishops				Other/Non-Affiliated			
	Average % Division Participation	% Against Gov	% For Gov	Average % Attendance	Average % Division Participation	% Against Gov	% For Gov	Average % Attendance	Average % Division Participation	% Against Gov	% For Gov	
1998–99	N/A	58.2	41.79	N/A	N/A	53.65	46.34	N/A	N/A	72.22	27.77	Labour
1999–00	7.8	66.6	33.4	34.9	2.8	27.1	72.9	15.5	7.5	50.4	49.6	
2000–01	11.0	45.1	54.9	35.5	3.6	15.8	84.2	13.6	8.4	54.2	45.9	
2001–02	10.6	60.5	39.5	36.9	3.3	68.0	32.0	19.7	6.5	62.9	37.1	
2002–03	11.2	63.4	36.6	37.6	4.0	63.8	36.3	16.5	8.2	60.4	39.6	
2003–04	12.3	60.5	39.5	39.4	2.9	54.5	45.5	20.1	10.1	60.8	39.2	
2004–05	15.8	71.1	28.9	41.1	4.3	71.4	28.6	17.6	9.8	63.9	36.1	
2005–06	12.9	59.0	41.0	40.6	2.1	55.4	44.6	16.7	12.9	54.4	45.6	
2006–07	12.8	72.4	27.6	42.1	2.2	89.5	10.5	17.0	16.0	59.4	40.6	
2007–08	14.6	57.1	42.9	41.7	4.2	50.4	49.6	18.8	26.0	47.6	52.4	
2008–09	13.2	58.4	41.6	40.9	2.1	60.0	40.0	17.8	13.8	40.3	59.7	
2009–10	15.0	54.3	45.7	43.7	4.8	65.4	34.6	16.4	16.8	40.8	59.2	
2010–12	25.1	60.4	39.6	47.4	5.8	74.6	25.4	18.9	22.9	60.7	39.3	Coalition
2012–13	24.4	66.0	34.0	48.7	6.3	81.8	18.2	19.6	29.2	73.0	27.0	
2013–14	27.4	67.4	32.6	51.8	6.0	83.5	16.5	19.7	31.3	70.9	29.1	
2014–15	21.6	73.6	26.4	48.3	5.3	78.6	21.4	17.9	28.7	66.9	33.2	
2015–16	19.5	47.6	52.4	48.8	3.7	76.9	23.1	18.6	27.9	63.0	37.0	Conservative

Notes: 'Average % Division Participation' data for 1998–99 to 2009–10 is for all votes. For 2010–12 to 2015–16 it is for whipped votes only. '% Against Gov' / '% For Gov' includes whipped votes only (a vote against the government is where a representative of the government is one/both of the tellers for the other side). Please see section 3 of this briefing for an explanation of the table headings. The 2010–12 session was a long session.

(Source: House of Lords Library; House of Lords, *Members' Voting Records by Party or Group*, 1985–6 to 2009–10; House of Lords Journal Office)

Table 7: Division Participation: Percentage of Votes Cast by Peers, by Party/Group in Voting Categories, 2010–15 Parliament

Categories	2010–12				2012–13			
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Crossbench	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Crossbench
0–10	9.3%	7.3%	4.5%	40.7%	9.3%	7.2%	4.6%	41.0%
11–20	5.7%	5.6%	1.1%	10.8%	5.6%	4.1%	3.4%	12.2%
21–30	4.4%	5.6%	3.4%	12.4%	7.9%	8.6%	4.6%	11.7%
31–40	7.0%	6.8%	5.6%	11.3%	4.2%	4.5%	2.3%	13.3%
41–50	11.0%	8.1%	7.9%	9.8%	8.3%	6.3%	10.3%	7.4%
51–60	11.0%	11.5%	7.9%	6.7%	8.8%	11.7%	14.9%	5.9%
61–70	12.3%	17.9%	16.9%	3.6%	13.4%	22.1%	13.8%	5.3%
71–80	12.3%	14.1%	22.5%	3.6%	14.4%	14.0%	18.4%	1.6%
81–90	14.5%	15.8%	19.1%	1.0%	12.5%	17.6%	14.9%	1.6%
91–100	12.3%	7.3%	11.2%	0.0%	15.7%	4.1%	12.6%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Categories	2013–14				2014–15			
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Crossbench	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Crossbench
0–10	8.9%	5.4%	5.2%	37.5%	10.9%	8.2%	5.8%	45.2%
11–20	6.7%	5.9%	3.1%	13.0%	5.7%	6.4%	2.9%	11.2%
21–30	6.2%	4.5%	5.2%	10.3%	7.8%	6.8%	8.7%	17.0%
31–40	3.1%	5.0%	2.1%	8.2%	5.2%	6.8%	6.7%	7.4%
41–50	6.2%	4.1%	4.1%	11.4%	7.8%	5.9%	10.6%	8.0%
51–60	8.4%	10.9%	9.3%	5.4%	10.0%	13.6%	15.4%	5.3%
61–70	10.7%	14.0%	20.6%	7.6%	13.0%	15.9%	15.4%	3.2%
71–80	13.8%	19.9%	16.5%	2.2%	13.9%	14.5%	12.5%	1.6%
81–90	17.3%	17.2%	19.6%	4.3%	9.1%	16.4%	11.5%	1.1%
91–100	18.7%	13.1%	14.4%	0.0%	16.5%	5.5%	10.6%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Notes: This table presents data for the percentage of a party or group’s Members who participated in 1–10 percent of divisions, 11–20 percent of divisions, and so on. Percentages are calculated on the basis of the total number of divisions a Member was eligible to vote in. It is based on whipped divisions only. All sessions are under the 2010–15 Coalition Government. The 2010–12 session was a long session.

(Source: House of Lords Library; House of Lords Journal Office)

Table 8: Division Participation: Percentage of Votes Cast by Peers, by Party/Group in Voting Categories, 2015–16 Session

Categories	2015–16			
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Crossbench
0–10	6.9%	9.3%	7.3%	41.3%
11–20	3.5%	6.5%	2.8%	19.0%
21–30	3.1%	8.8%	3.7%	16.4%
31–40	3.5%	15.3%	3.7%	10.6%
41–50	9.3%	18.1%	7.3%	6.9%
51–60	10.8%	20.0%	13.8%	2.1%
61–70	10.0%	16.7%	21.1%	3.7%
71–80	15.1%	4.7%	23.9%	0.0%
81–90	18.1%	0.5%	14.7%	0.0%
91–100	19.7%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

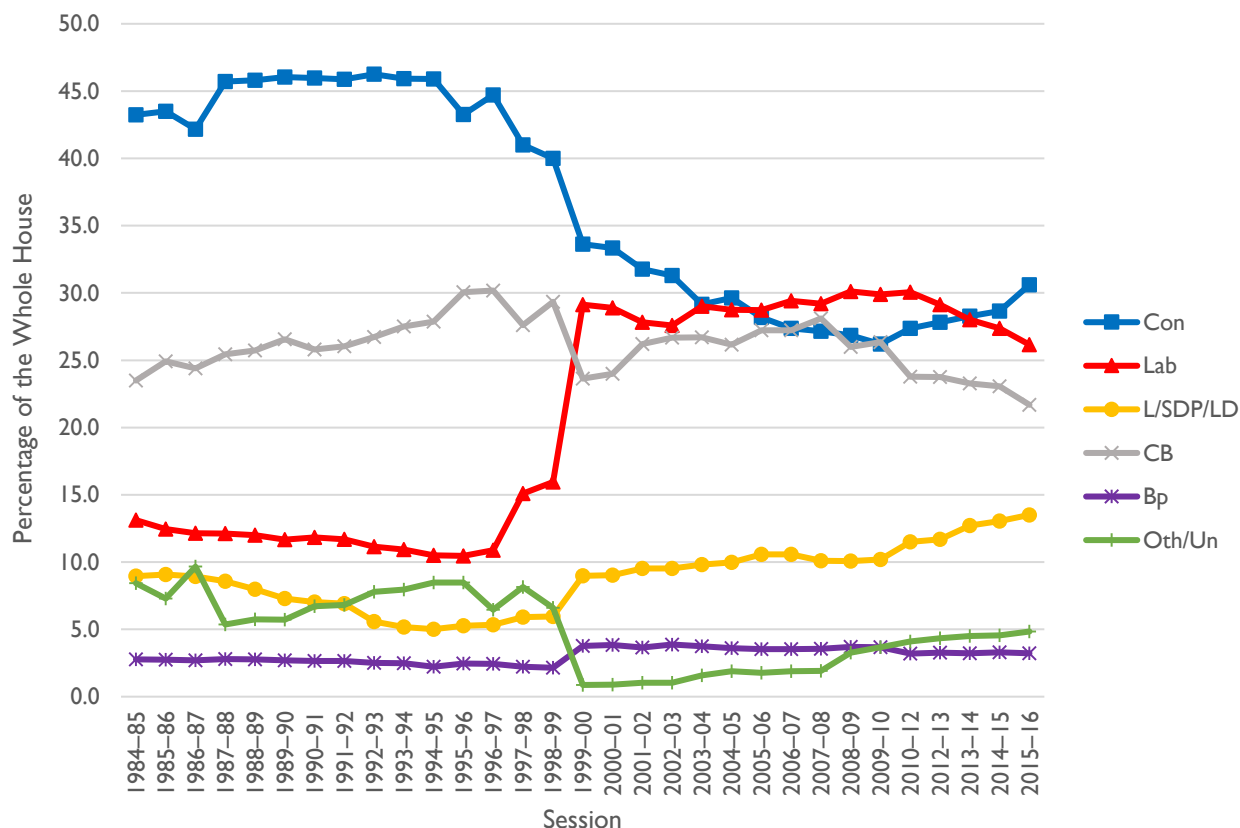
Notes: This table presents data for the percentage of a party or group's Members who participated in 1–10 percent of divisions, 11–20 percent of divisions, and so on. Percentages are calculated on the basis of the total number of divisions a Member was eligible to vote in. It is based on whipped divisions only.

(Sources: House of Lords Library; House of Lords Journal Office)

4. Key Findings from the Tables

Party Strengths

The Conservatives were consistently the largest party in the House of Lords between 1984 and 1999. Following the House of Lords Act 1999, the size of the Labour group grew and at times had more Members than the Conservatives. During the Coalition Government of 2010–15 the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were in government together, increasing the number of Members belonging to a governing party in the House of Lords. At the end of the 2014–15 session the Conservative and Labour parties were similar in size, although with the Conservatives as the slightly larger group. The size of the Crossbench group had remained between 23 percent and 30 percent of the whole House throughout this period. At the end of the 2015–16 session the Crossbenchers had fallen to 21.7 percent of the whole House. The Conservative Party stood at 30.6 percent, its highest percentage of the whole House since 2002–03. The Labour Party had fallen to 26.1 percent, its lowest since the 1998–99 session. The Liberal Democrats stood at 13.5 percent, their highest since 1984–85.

Chart 3: Composition of the House as a Percentage of the Whole House, 1984–85 to 2015–16¹³

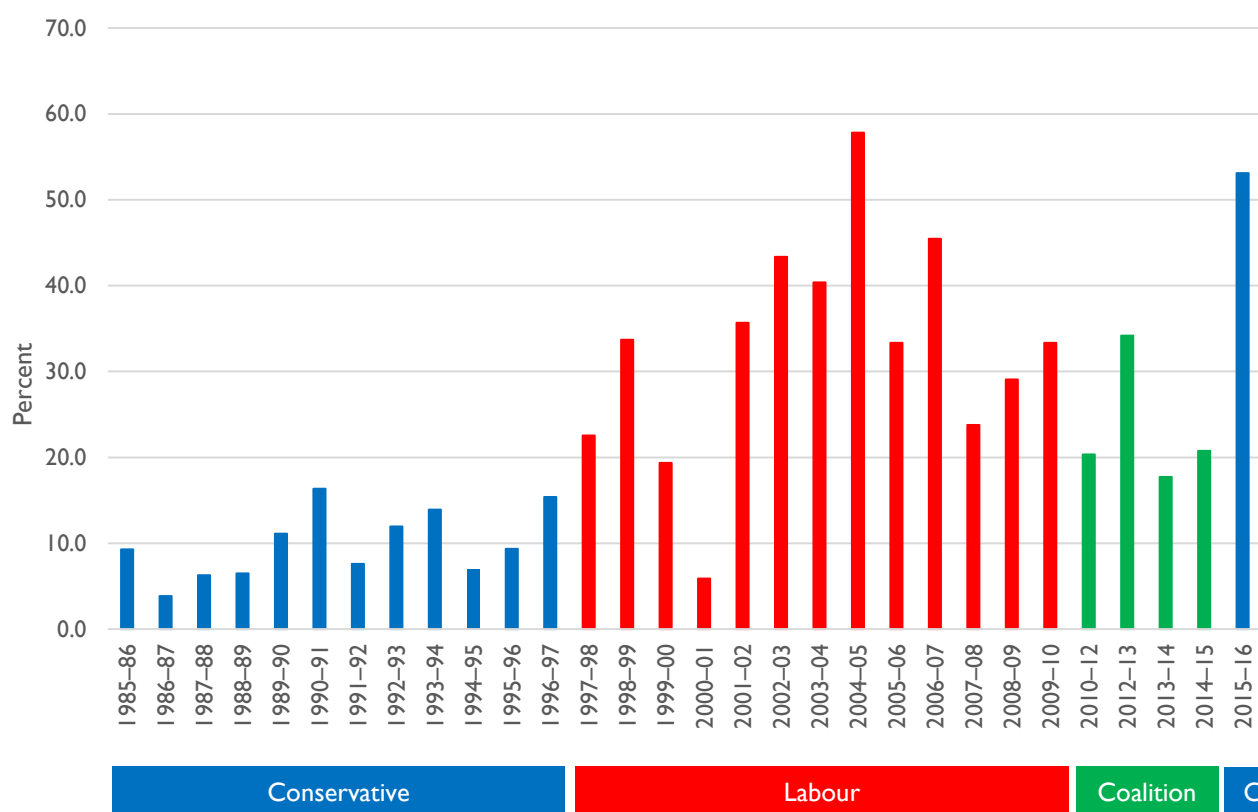
Party Political Members

The number of Members taking a party whip has remained fairly constant since 1984. The number of Members in receipt of a party whip has fallen below 60 percent only once, in 1995–96. As at the end of the 2015–16 session party Members accounted for 70.3 percent of the whole House. This is the largest percentage since the 2000–01 session.

Government Defeats

Labour suffered more defeats in government (from 1997 to 2010) than Conservative Governments (from 1979 to 1997), both in absolute terms and as a percentage of whipped divisions. However, the composition of the House of Lords before and after the House of Lords Act 1999 was notably different, and this should be considered when comparing these figures. Between 1997 and 2010 the Labour Governments were defeated on average in 33.0 percent of whipped divisions. The Coalition Government suffered fewer defeats, with an average of 22.4 percent of whipped divisions ending in defeat. In the first session of the 2015 parliament, the Conservative Government suffered defeats in 53.1 percent of whipped divisions. This is the second highest percentage of defeats since the 1985–86 session, after the 2004–05 session when the Labour Government lost 57.8 percent of whipped divisions.

¹³ For the Liberal Party, SDP and the Liberal Democrats, this is a combined figure. Until their merger in 1988 the Liberal Party and the SDP were separate. Following the merger in 1988 a number of Peers continued to sit as SDP members. These are not provided separately for consistency.

Chart 4: Government Defeats as a Percentage of Whipped Divisions, 1985–86 to 2015–16

Voting Patterns

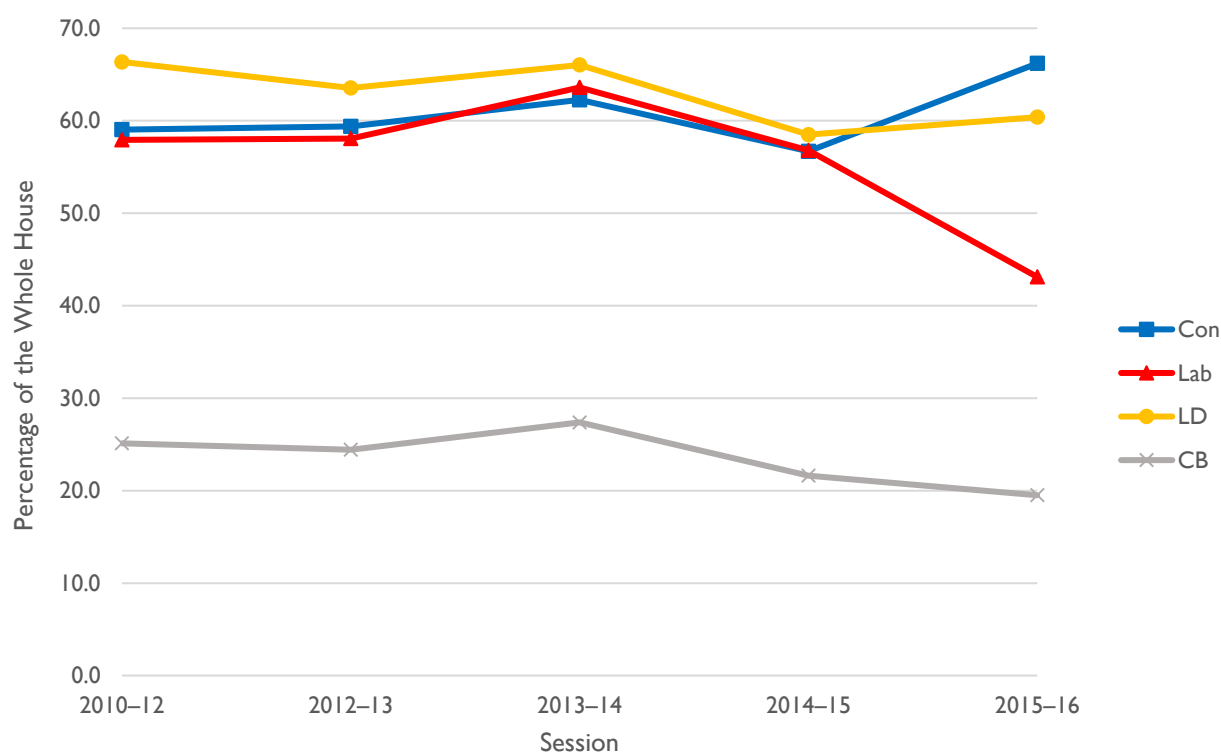
Between 1998 and 2010, both the Conservatives and Labour maintained a largely cohesive vote at divisions. As the Opposition, perhaps unsurprisingly the Conservatives largely voted against the government(s), whereas Labour Members, on the government side, largely for. Until 2010 the Liberal Democrats as a group split its votes, but, on average, voted more often against the Labour Government(s) than for.¹⁴ In every session since 1998–99 (bar two), the Crossbenchers have on average voted more often against the government of the day than with it. However, it should be noted that they are more evenly split between voting for and against the government than the three largest parties as they have no whip.

During the 2010 parliament, the three largest parties all had similar average levels of participation in divisions. The Conservatives varied between 56.7 and 62.3 percent, Labour between 56.8 and 63.6 percent, and the Liberal Democrats between 58.5 and 66.4 percent. The Crossbenchers varied between 21.6 and 27.4 percent. However, prior to 2010–12 the average levels of participation in divisions were generally lower for all four groups.

¹⁴ Meg Russell and Maria Sciarra noted a “marked” change between 1999 and 2005. They wrote in 2007: “In the early years of the Blair Government the party tended to support it on divisions called by the Conservatives. In more recent years, this pattern has been reversed, with Liberal Democrats increasingly tending to oppose the Government in most divisions and often taking the lead on pressing for votes on issues such as civil liberties” (in Meg Russell and Maria Sciarra, ‘Why Does the Government get Defeated in the House of Lords? The Lords, the Party System and British Politics’, *British Politics*, 2007, vol 2, p 314).

Looking more closely at the average division participation rates for Members by party/group over the 2010 parliament one sees a number of similarities. Chart 5 shows average division participation data for the 2010 parliament and for the first session of the 2015 parliament.

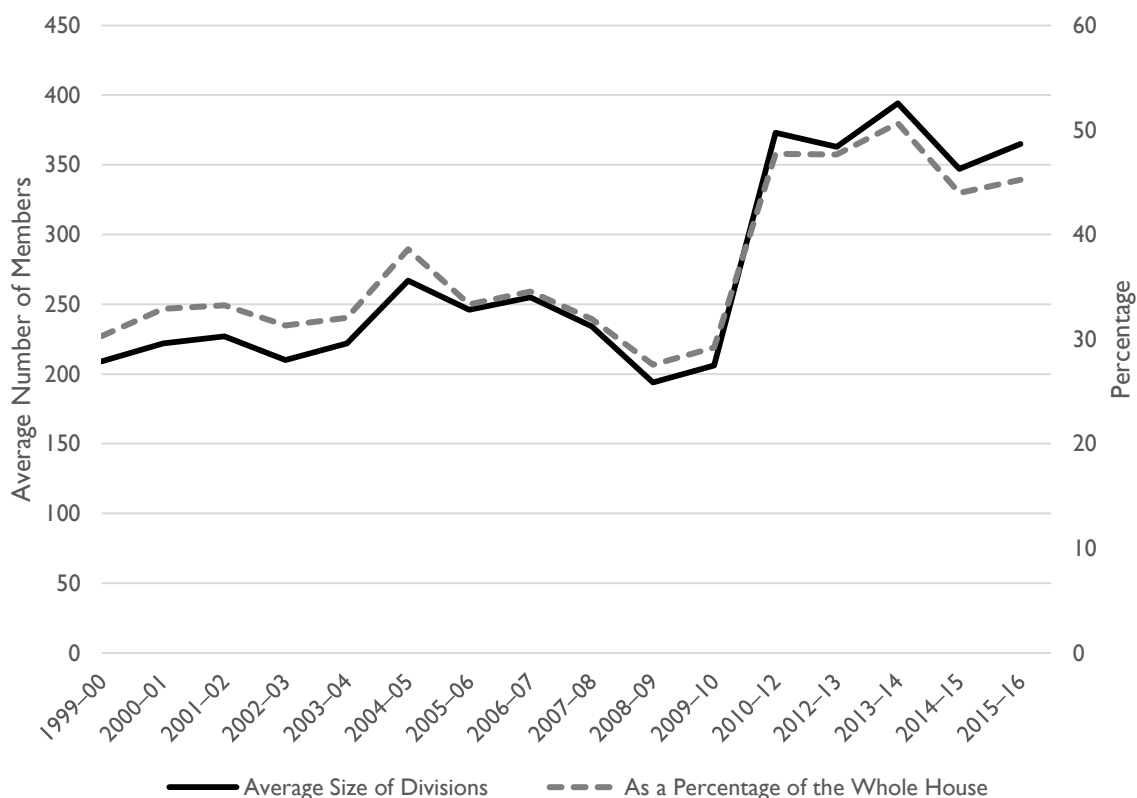
Chart 5: Average Division Participation Rate for Members by Party/Group, 2010–12 to 2015–16



The three largest parties and the Crossbenchers all increased their average division participation rate between 2012–13 and 2013–14. However, this figure fell for all of those groups between 2013–14 and 2014–15. In the first session of the 2015 parliament, both the Conservative's and Liberal Democrat's participation in divisions increased. In contrast, the Labour Party decreased from 56.8 percent to 43.1 percent. This is its lowest since 2009–10. The Crossbenchers also decreased from 21.6 percent to 19.5 percent.

Overall, the average size of divisions per session remained relatively constant between 1999–2000 and 2009–10. However, during the 2010 parliament the average number of Members voting in each division increased markedly. In the 2015–16 session the average size of divisions remained at this higher level. However, over this time period the size of the House has increased from 690 to 807, an increase of 17.0 percent.¹⁵ Chart 6 shows both the average number of Members voting per division and this value as a percentage of the whole House.

¹⁵ Those Members eligible to sit.

Chart 6: Average Number of Members Voting in Divisions, 1999–2000 to 2015–16

This shows that whilst the increase in the size of the House may have had an effect on division size, the average size of divisions has still increased when taking the size of the House into account.

5. Issues to Consider: Political Dynamics in the House of Lords

In the House of Commons, governments are usually formed on the basis of a clear political majority of MPs. Votes can thus be won by ensuring party turnout and maintaining party cohesion. In contrast, membership of the House of Lords produces a more nuanced picture, with a large party political element accompanied by a significant number of politically non-aligned Members. As a result, when a government is defeated in the House of Lords this is usually through the combination of different parties/groups, rather than through the votes of the governing/opposition parties alone. Moreover, the number of Members of the House of Lords that take part in votes is usually significantly lower than their respective party's or group's overall potential number. As Nicholas Baldwin has observed, "there is a marked difference between the total possible membership and the actual achieved day-to-day membership".¹⁶ In her discussion of attendance, voting and voting cohesion in *The Contemporary House of Lords*, Meg Russell argues that this is because many Peers "do not treat membership as a full-time job" and that:

In the past this was explicable partly by the presence of those who arrived in the chamber by accident of birth, rather than through choosing a political career [...] many Members are elderly and find it difficult to attend. Another contributing factor is the

¹⁶ Nicholas Baldwin, 'Behavioural Changes: A New Professionalism and a More Independent House', in Phillip Norton (ed), *Parliament in the 1980s*, 1985, pp 109–10.

tradition—indeed often the explicit objective—that ‘expert’ Members should continue to pursue their professional interests outside of parliament. Indeed, the fact that there is no salary associated with membership of the Lords means that many Members consider work outside the chamber a financial necessity.¹⁷

It is worth noting that as a result of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 Members may now retire from the House. At this time it is unclear what impact this might have on overall attendance rates.¹⁸ To date, 65 Members have retired from the House.¹⁹

The role played by the party whips is another factor that affects voting behaviour. The whips aim to achieve as high, and as cohesive, a number of votes from those Members taking their party whip as possible. However, it is recognised that there is a limit to what they can do. Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock have said:

It is in any case a long-recognised truth that party discipline in the Lords is very much more relaxed, and whipping is less effective, than in the Commons. Peers, of course, do not face the hurdle of re-election, contemplation of which helps to concentrate minds of MPs (sometimes with the prompting of their whips) on where their loyalties, and their self interests, ultimately lie. Thus, to quote one respondent, a government whip: ‘whipping in the Lords carries no real sanction and bringing people in at the last minute is difficult—but whips need to be seen to be doing their best’.²⁰

Lord Davies of Oldham, Deputy Chief Whip (2003–10) in the Labour Governments, described the work of the whips in an essay published in *Parliament in the 21st Century*. Recalling being asked questions by a colleague in the House of Commons about the powers and sanctions available to whips in the House of Lords, he said that “given the fact that the Whips’ Office is expected to be the engine room of power in any legislature, my answer to these cardinal questions must have seemed strange, namely, ‘Nil’”.²¹ Donald Shell argues that the whips only have one power, that of persuasion:

Whipping in the Lords remains essentially low-key. It may be possible to persuade Peers, but they cannot be coerced, commanded or bullied. In attempting persuasion, appeals to party loyalty may be used and may be effective in some quarters, but in general such appeals are probably less effective than reasoned arguments.²²

Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters agree, writing that:

The government presence is, relatively speaking, much smaller in the Lords than in the Commons, and promise of ministerial office is accordingly much less influential. The government’s influence over its own backbenchers and over other Members of the House is, in the absence of a large ‘payroll’ membership, that much weaker.²³

¹⁷ Meg Russell, *The Contemporary House of Lords*, 2013, pp 108–10.

¹⁸ For further information see: House of Lords Library, [Retirement from the House of Lords](#), 13 February 2015.

¹⁹ UK Parliament website, [Retired Members of the House of Lords](#), accessed 1 March 2017.

²⁰ Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, ‘Government Legislation: An Overview’, in Donald Shell and David Beamish (eds), *The House of Lords at Work*, 1992, p 85.

²¹ Lord Davies of Oldham, ‘Parliament, Parties and Whips: A View from the Lords’, in Nicholas Baldwin (ed), *Parliament in the 21st Century*, 2005, p 200.

²² Donald Shell, ‘House of Lords and the Thatcher Government’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 1985, vol 38, p 29.

²³ Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament Works*, 2015, p 114.

As a result, there is more scope for Members in the House of Lords than for their colleagues in the House of Commons to vote, or not, as they choose. As Meg Russell and Maria Sciara note, an additional dimension to the work of the whips resulting from this freedom is that Members may be encouraged not to vote rather than vote against the whip:

Members who disagree with their frontbench line are strongly encouraged by their whips to stay away, rather than to vote against. This saves the party embarrassment, and also loses it only one vote (rather than losing it one and gaining its opponent one).²⁴

Crossbenchers have no party whip and therefore have complete freedom to vote how they wish, or not to vote at all. This is not an insignificant factor as Crossbenchers remain a sizeable collective presence in the House. Nevertheless, although their attendance rates and participation in divisions are lower than those of the three largest parties they have increased in recent sessions. Meg Russell has written that the Crossbench Convenor has put increasing emphasis on both attendance and voting, writing that:

One former convenor suggested that if Crossbenchers vote more often they are more likely to be seen as ‘a force’, and also as ‘an asset’ (as some fear for the group’s existence should the Lords be replaced by a wholly elected chamber) [...] Crossbenchers clearly confront greater challenges regarding how to cast their vote than party peers, who if in doubt can simply follow the directions of their whip. Hence, some would like abstentions to be officially recorded, in order to make clearer when they were present in the chamber and simply chose not to vote for either side.²⁵

The Bishops, similarly, have no whip, though they represent a far smaller proportion of the House.²⁶

Finally, the impact of absence might be significant, but its prevalence across each of the parties/groups is difficult to gauge. As Meg Russell and Maria Sciara observe:

Given the many possible reasons for absence from divisions, and the fact that members cannot request that an abstention is formally recorded, it is impossible to know how much deliberate abstention goes on in the Lords.²⁷

In conclusion, though their impact may be difficult to quantify, the factors discussed above, whether singularly or in combination, affect whether a Member of the House of Lords casts their vote and, if they do, how they cast it. These factors should be taken into consideration in any attempt to examine voting behaviour and party strength in the House of Lords. Nicholas Baldwin expressed the unique nature of each vote in the House:

The outcome of any division depends upon two basic factors, namely the numbers of members voting and the way in which they cast their votes. The basic factors in turn depend upon a number of variables, such as the subject under discussion, the advocacy

²⁴ Meg Russell and Maria Sciara, ‘Why Does the Government get Defeated in the House of Lords? The Lords, the Party System and British Politics’, *British Politics*, 2007, vol 2, pp 299–322 and p 307.

²⁵ Meg Russell, *The Contemporary House of Lords*, 2013, p 112.

²⁶ For further analysis see: Andrew Connell, ‘[Prelates as Part-time Parliamentarians: The Attendance and Participation of the Lords Spiritual in the Contemporary House of Lords](#)’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 31 May 2016, pp 1–21.

²⁷ *ibid.*

of certain individuals, the day of the week and the hour of the day. Any exposition of the political complexion of the House of Lords is invalidated unless it takes into account these factors.²⁸

Nevertheless, despite the apparent reduced effectiveness of whipping in the Lords versus the Commons, Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters argue that:

Party loyalty is much stronger in the House of Lords than might be imagined for an unelected chamber. Party cohesiveness, as measured in voting habits, is very high and there are few who rebel against the party whip. Thus, in whipped votes in the 2010–12 session the Labour Party achieved 99 percent cohesion, the Conservatives 97 percent and the Liberal Democrats 94 percent.²⁹

6. Further Analysis on Voting Patterns

Voting behaviour in the House of Lords is a subject that remains relatively under-researched. The bibliography in section 7 of this briefing does list notable studies, however, including those by Lord Norton of Louth (2003), Emma Crewe (2005) and Meg Russell and Maria Sciara (2007). Meg Russell and Maria Sciara have also assessed the Crossbencher's influence on the outcomes of divisions.³⁰ Meg Russell's *The Contemporary House of Lords* (2013) provides an extensive analysis of the work of the House of Lords and the role of the parties and groups within the Chamber. Austin Mitchell, in his book *Farewell My Lords* (1999), interviewed a number of Peers about the role of the party and of the whips, particularly their perceptions and experiences (see pages 101–17).³¹ Those interested in specific votes in previous sessions should consult the '[Lords Divisions Results](#)' page of the UK parliament website.

As a result of the rough parity in size between the Conservatives and Labour in the House of Lords in recent years, attention has often been focused on the other groups in the House. This has been with the aim of assessing which, if any one group, may hold the balance between a government victory and a government defeat at a vote. This focus traditionally fell upon the Crossbench members. As Meg Russell and Maria Sciara have said, “at first glance the Crossbenchers look to be a pivotal group in the House of Lords, given their numbers and the lack of a government majority”.³² However, they add that a “second look, based on their voting records, suggests otherwise”. This, they noted, was unsurprising as they do not have a whip to follow and do not all vote the same way. They concluded:

A more considered analysis finds that the Crossbenchers' presence has subtle but important effects, and is in fact central to the ethos of the House of Lords. The Crossbenchers personify in many ways what the Lords is known for: expertise, independence from party and reasoned debate. Examining the group therefore demonstrates the challenges of assessing parliamentary influence, given that much of this

²⁸ Nicholas Baldwin, 'Behavioural Changes: A New Professionalism and a More Independent House', in Phillip Norton (ed), *Parliament in the 1980s*, 1985, pp 109–10.

²⁹ Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament Works*, 2015, p 37.

³⁰ Meg Russell and Maria Sciara, 'Independent Parliamentarians En Masse: The Changing Nature and Role of the 'Crossbenchers' in the House of Lords', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2009, vol 62, pp 32–52.

³¹ Austin Mitchell, *Farewell My Lords*, 1999, pp 101–17.

³² Meg Russell and Maria Sciara, 'Independent Parliamentarians En Masse: The Changing Nature and Role of the 'Crossbenchers' in the House of Lords', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2009, vol 62, pp 32–52 and p 49.

is complex, informal and behind-the-scenes. It depends as much upon dialogue and persuasion as on voting and defeats.³³

It was the Liberal Democrats that Meg Russell and Maria Sciara, writing in 2007, said were “the most important pivotal group in the House of Lords”.³⁴ In their analysis, noting the relatively small size of the Liberal Democrat group, they argued that:

[I]n the overwhelming majority of cases it is, therefore, Liberal Democrat votes, coupled with those of the Conservatives, that are responsible for inflicting government defeat. Of the 264 defeats where the Liberal Democrats opposed the government, it would have won in 179 if they had abstained, or in 256 had they voted with it (as always, assuming that the behaviour of other groups remained unchanged).³⁵

However, the entry of the Liberal Democrats into Coalition Government with the Conservatives, following the 2010 general election, created a numerical majority over Labour in the House of Lords, which arguably changed the dynamics of the Chamber. Writing in 2013, three years into the Coalition, Meg Russell argued that:

[T]he votes of Crossbenchers became far more critical to voting outcomes. Labour lacked adequate members to beat the Government on its own, so aside from Government backbench rebellions, or interventions by the Bishops, these were the only pivotal voters left.³⁶

In *The Contemporary House of Lords*, Meg Russell presents an analysis of the voting in the first two years of the Coalition Government, asserting that the turnout of Crossbenchers “increased and [...] their votes came to matter almost as much to inflicting Government defeat as the votes of Labour Peers”.³⁷ However, she also writes that the Crossbenchers still remained a politically non-aligned group:

[They] continued to hold assiduously to [their] neutral stance. Even when a Crossbencher tables a high-profile amendment, the only appeal that they can make to their fellow group members at weekly group meetings is to ‘listen to the arguments and consider voting for it’.³⁸

Similar attention has been paid to the Bishops, though it is acknowledged that their impact “is limited by the fact that they are a small group, and that like the Crossbenchers they vote relatively little, and do not vote as a cohesive block”.³⁹

The 2015 general election returned a majority Conservative Government in the House of Commons. Writing in the *Times* about the ramifications of the results on the Lords, Viscount Ridley (Conservative) said of David Cameron that “while gaining seats in the

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, p 314.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Meg Russell, *The Contemporary House of Lords*, 2013, p 120.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, p 121.

³⁹ Meg Russell and Maria Sciara, ‘Why Does the Government get Defeated in the House of Lords? The Lords, the Party System and British Politics’, *British Politics*, 2007, vol 2, pp 299–322. See House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Religious Representation](#) (25 November 2011) for further analysis of Bishops’ voting.

Commons from the Liberal Democrats, he has effectively lost them in the Lords”.⁴⁰ Meg Russell reflected a similar view writing:

The government can readily be defeated by various combinations of other forces—including Labour, Liberal Democrats, Bishops and Crossbenchers. These last two groups vote less frequently than party peers, and also do not vote as a block. So the key group is—once again—the Liberal Democrats. They are now numerically stronger than before, and following recent events are badly bruised. Despite having worked until recently alongside the Conservatives, their instincts may now often be to vote with Labour.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Viscount Ridley, ‘[Cameron Faces Guerrilla Warfare in the Lords](#)’, *Times* (£), 11 May 2015.

⁴¹ Meg Russell, ‘[Cameron’s Parliamentary Challenge #2: Managing the Lords](#)’, UCL Constitution Unit Blog, 11 May 2015.

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