



Representation of Women in Parliament Debate on 5 February 2018

Summary

On 5 February 2018, the House of Lords is scheduled to debate a motion moved by Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Conservative) “that this House takes note of the role of women in public life and the progress made in increasing their representation in Parliament 100 years after the Representation of the People Act 1918 received Royal Assent”.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 was a milestone piece of legislation. It gave women over the age of 30 who met certain property qualifications the right to vote at parliamentary elections for the first time. It was closely followed by another key development, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918. This gave women the right to stand for election to the House of Commons for the first time. Over the next 100 years, progress in women’s representation in Parliament can be seen through other notable developments, including (but not limited to):

- Nancy Astor (Conservative) becoming the first woman to take a seat in the Commons, in 1919.
- The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928, which gave women the right to vote on the same terms as men. 2018 is the 90th anniversary of the passing of this Act.
- The Life Peerages Act 1958, which permitted the creation of peerages for life for women, and consequently the first four women taking seats in the Lords, in 1958. 2018 is the 60th anniversary of the passing of this Act.
- Margaret Thatcher (Conservative) becoming the first female Prime Minister in 1979.
- Baroness Young (Conservative) becoming the first female Leader of the House of Lords in 1981.
- Betty Boothroyd (Labour) becoming the first female Speaker of the House of Commons in 1992.
- Ann Taylor (Labour) becoming the first female Leader of the Commons in 1997 and first female Chief Whip in 1998.
- Baroness Hayman (Labour) becoming the first Lord Speaker in 2006.

The primary focus of this Briefing is on women’s representation within the House of Lords and the House of Commons from 1918 to the present day. However, a selection of statistics on women in other areas of public life are also provided, including on public appointments, the judiciary, police and NHS.

Table of Contents

1. Women in Parliament: Chronology of Key Developments, 1918 to 2018
2. Statistics
3. Further Reading

Table of Contents

1. Women in Parliament: Chronology of Key Developments, 1918 to 2018	1
2. Statistics	10
2.1 House of Lords.....	10
2.2 House of Commons.....	12
2.3 Current Cabinet.....	14
2.4 Women in Wider Public Life.....	14
3. Further Reading	17

A full list of Lords Library briefings is available on the [research briefings page](#) on the internet. The Library publishes briefings for all major items of business debated in the House of Lords. The Library also publishes briefings on the House of Lords itself and other subjects that may be of interest to Members.

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I. Women in Parliament: Chronology of Key Developments, 1918 to 2018

The following list is not exhaustive, but details a number of the key developments to take place in women's representation in Parliament since 1918.

Voting Rights: Representation of the People Act 1918

The Representation of the People Act 1918 was a milestone piece of legislation, enabling women over 30 to register for a parliamentary vote as long as they, or their husband, met minimum property qualifications.¹ Prior to this legislation, no British women were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections, and so this Act, given royal assent on 6 February 1918, gave certain women the right to vote at parliamentary elections for the first time.²

The Act also increased the male franchise, enabling all British men over the age of 21 to register to vote in parliamentary elections, as long as they fulfilled residence requirements and were not legally disqualified.³ The House of Commons Library has noted that, had the age restriction on women not been included in the Act, and women over the age of 21 been allowed to vote, up to 14 million women would have been able to vote in parliamentary elections at this time.⁴ Due to the loss of men during the First World War, this number of women would have formed the majority of the electorate.

According to a recent publication by Vote 100—a project to mark a number of anniversaries in Parliament—in total the Act gave the parliamentary vote to 12,913,166 men and 8,479,156 women.⁵

Right to Stand for Election to the House of Commons: Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 and First Woman Elected

On 21 November 1918, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 was given royal assent.⁶ This Act gave women the right to stand for election to the House of Commons for the first time. The Act was passed three weeks before the 1918 general election, which had been called following the end of the First World War. Following the enactment of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, 17 women stood for election in the

¹ House of Commons Library, [The History of the Parliamentary Franchise](#), 1 March 2013, p 5; and UK Parliament website, [Representation of the People Act 1918: Transcription of Chapter 64](#), accessed 25 January 2018.

² For an in-depth history of the parliamentary franchise, see: House of Commons Library, [The History of the Parliamentary Franchise](#), 1 March 2013.

³ *ibid*, p 44.

⁴ *ibid*, p 45. See also: Homer Lawrence Morris, *Parliamentary Franchise Reform in England from 1885 to 1918*, 1921, p 146.

⁵ Houses of Parliament, [Women in Parliament: A Guide to the History of Women's Participation in Parliament and their Representation in the Historical Collections](#), 1 April 2015, p 6.

⁶ [HC Hansard, 21 November 1918, cols 3477–8](#).

general election held on 14 December 1918, out of a total of 1,623 candidates.⁷

As a result of this general election, the only woman elected, Countess (Constance) Markievicz, became the first woman to gain a seat in the House of Commons as Sinn Féin MP for the Dublin St. Patrick's constituency.⁸ At the time of being elected, she was being detained in Holloway prison.⁹ However, despite being elected, in accordance with the practice of other Sinn Féin members Constance Markievicz refused to take the parliamentary oath and never took her seat in the Commons.¹⁰

Christabel Pankhurst, one of the other 16 female candidates, stood for the Women's Party in Smethwick. She had polled over 8,000 votes in the election.¹¹ Although she had lost by 775 votes, this was the highest vote achieved by any of the women candidates. None of the remaining 16 female candidates subsequently became MPs, though three tried again.¹²

First Female MP to take her Seat in the Commons: 1919

On 15 November 1919, Viscountess (Nancy) Astor became the second woman elected to the Commons, as Conservative MP for the Sutton division of Plymouth.¹³ This was as the result of a by-election. Her husband had been the incumbent of the seat. However, due to the death of his father, he succeeded to the peerage and was consequently no longer able to keep his seat.

On 1 December 1919, Nancy Astor became the first female MP to take her seat in the House of Commons, giving her maiden speech in the House on 24 February 1920.¹⁴ The speech was on the subject of alcohol abuse, and she concluded her remarks with reference to her unique position in the Commons:

I do not want you to look on your lady Member as a fanatic or lunatic. I am simply trying to speak for hundreds of women and children throughout the country who cannot speak for themselves.¹⁵

A few years later, Nancy Astor achieved another 'first' for women in the House, by introducing a private member's bill which made provision to

⁷ House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 8.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ For further information, see: House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 8; and Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918–1966*, 1967, pp 13–14.

¹⁰ Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918–1966*, 1967, pp 13–14.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p 13.

¹² *ibid.*, p 15.

¹³ House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 8.

¹⁴ [HC Hansard, 24 February 1920, col 1631.](#)

¹⁵ *ibid.*

restrict those under the age of 18 from buying alcohol.¹⁶ On 31 July 1923, the Bill was passed as The Intoxicating Liquor (Sale to Persons under Eighteen) Act 1923, and Nancy Astor became the first woman to introduce a bill that became law.¹⁷

In 1921, Margaret Wintringham (Liberal) became the second female MP, elected in a by-election in Louth.¹⁸ The first female Labour MPs were elected at the 1923 general election: Margaret Bondfield, Dorothea Jewson and Susan Lawrence.¹⁹

Equal Franchisement: Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928

On 2 July 1928, ten years after the Representation of the People Act 1918, the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 was passed. Among its provisions, the Act gave women the right to vote on the same terms as men, at age 21, and removed qualifying tests. The current voting age of 18 was not established until 1969.²⁰

Following the passing of the 1928 Act, 14 female MPs were elected to Parliament at the 1929 general election. Of these, nine were Labour, three were Conservative, one was Liberal, and one was Independent.²¹ This was almost four times as many women as had been elected in the previous election in 1924, where four had been elected, and took the total percentage of women MPs from 1 percent to 2 percent of the total membership of the House.

First Female Cabinet Minister: 1929

On 7 June 1929, Margaret Bondfield (Labour) was appointed Minister of Labour and as such became first female member of the Cabinet and the first British female politician to be admitted to the Privy Council.²² This followed another first in 1924, when she had been the first woman to hold any ministerial office when appointed as Under Secretary in the Ministry of Labour.

Increase in Female MPs: 1945

Following the Second World War, the number of female MPs elected to the House of Commons rose from nine in the 1938 election to 24 in the 1945

¹⁶ Houses of Parliament, [Nancy Astor MP: The First Woman to Sit in the House of Commons 1919–1945](#), accessed 25 January 2018.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ For further information, see: House of Commons Library, [Women Members of Parliament](#), 18 January 2018.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ For information on the later legislation on the franchise, see: House of Commons Library, [The History of the Parliamentary Franchise](#), 1 March 2013.

²¹ House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017, p 22.

²² House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 11.

election. This saw the total number of female MPs ever elected since 1918 increase to 77.²³

Chair of Committee of the Whole House (Commons): 1948

Florence Paton (Labour) became the first woman to be nominated, by the then Speaker, to the Chairmen's Panel of Members in order to act as temporary chairman of committees of the whole House and chairman of standing committees. On 31 May 1948, she became the first woman to preside over a committee of the whole House.²⁴ However, she did not sit in the Speaker's Chair, but at the Table, as remains the case when the House is in committee.

First Female Members in the Lords: Life Peerages Act 1958

Whereas women's representation in the House of Commons had been gradually increasing since 1918, no women were able to take a seat in the House of Lords until 1958. The Life Peerages Act 1958, which received royal assent on 30 April 1958, permitted the creation of peerages for life.²⁵ The Act also made it explicit that women were eligible to receive a life peerage.²⁶ Hereditary peeresses in their own right, however, were not included in provisions in the Bill and continued to be excluded. Following the passing of the Act, the first 14 life Peers were announced on 24 July 1958, of whom four were women.²⁷

The first woman to be created a life Peer following the Life Peerages Act 1958 was Labour Peer Baroness Wootton of Abinger.²⁸ Her letters patent were sealed on 8 August 1958. However, she was not the first woman to take her seat in the Lords, Baroness Swanborough (Crossbench) took her seat on 21 October 1958.²⁹ At the end of 1958, there were 884 male Members in the Lords, and four women.³⁰

In 1961, Baroness Horsbrugh (Conservative) joined the then Lord Chancellor and one other Peer in giving royal assent to bills. She therefore became the first female member of a Royal Commission.³¹ The following year, at the start of the session in 1962, Baroness Elliot of Harwood

²³ House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017, p 22.

²⁴ House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 8.

²⁵ For a brief history of key development and proposals to reform the House of Lords, see: House of Lords Library, [History of the House of Lords: A Short Introduction](#), 27 April 2017.

²⁶ For a detailed history, see: House of Lords Library, [The Life Peerages Act 1958](#), 21 April 2008.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ [The London Gazette](#), 8 August 1958, p 4930. Her autobiography, *In a World I Never Made* (1967) describes her experiences in the House of Lords.

²⁹ [HL Hansard, 21 October 1958, col 661](#); and House of Lords Library, [The Life Peerages Act 1958](#), 21 April 2008, p 21.

³⁰ Years 1958 to 1983: *Vachers Parliamentary Companion*, the final edition of each year.

³¹ Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918–1966*, 1967, p 227; and [HL Hansard, 30 October 1962, cols 6–13](#).

(Conservative) became the first woman to move the humble address in reply to the Queen's Speech in the Lords.³²

Peerage Act 1963 and First Female Hereditary Peer to take her Seat in the Lords: 1963

It was not until five years after the 1958 Act that legislation was passed to also enable female hereditary Peers to take a seat in the House of Lords. The Peerage Act 1963 was given royal assent on 31 July 1963, and according to *Debrett's Peerage* for 1964, 20 hereditary peeresses were enabled to sit and vote in the Lords in their own right following its enactment.³³ On 19 November 1963, Baroness Strange of Knokin became the first woman to take her seat in the House of Lords by virtue of being a hereditary Peer.³⁴

'Firsts' for Women: 1964 to 1998

With women able to take seats in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, senior parliamentary and governmental posts gradually became filled by female parliamentarians in both Houses for the first time.

Table I shows a selection of these significant 'firsts' for women between 1964 and 1998.³⁵

³² Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918–1966*, 1967, p 227. For information on others who have moved the humble address in reply to the Queen's Speech in the Lords, see: House of Lords Library, [Queen's Speech: Lords Movers and Seconders](#), March 2017.

³³ See: House of Lords Library, [The Life Peerages Act 1958](#), 21 April 2008, p 22.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ For a full list of party or group leaders, as well as other positions held by women over time, see: House of Lords Library, [Women in the House of Lords](#), 30 June 2015.

Table 1: Firsts for Women, 1964 to 1998

Year	House	Title/Office	Name
1964	Commons	Parliamentary Whip	Harriet Slater
1965	Lords	Parliamentary Whip	Baroness Phillips
1965	Lords	Deputy Speaker	Baroness Wootton of Abinger
1970	Commons	Deputy Speaker	Betty Harvie Anderson
1974	Lords	Government Chief Whip	Baroness Llewelyn-Davies of Hastoe
1974	Lords	Convenor of the Crossbench Peers	Baroness Hylton-Foster
1975	Commons	Leader of the Opposition	Margaret Thatcher
1979	Commons	Prime Minister	Margaret Thatcher
1981	Lords	Leader of the House of Lords	Baroness Young
1992	Commons	Speaker of the House of Commons	Betty Boothroyd
1997	Commons	Leader of the House of Commons	Ann Taylor
1998	Commons	Government Chief Whip	Ann Taylor

(Source: House of Lords Library, [Women in the House of Lords](#), 30 June 2015; and House of Commons Library, [Women in Public Life, the Professions and the Boardroom](#), 27 July 2017, p 20)

Also during this time there was a significant increase in the number of female MPs in the Commons in 1997. Following the Labour victory at the 1997 general election, female MPs increased from 60 to 120.

House of Lords Act 1999

On 11 November 1999, the House of Lords Act 1999 was passed. The Act provided for reform of the membership of the Lords, with the removal of all but 90 hereditary Peers (and the holders of the offices of Earl Marshall and Lord Great Chamberlain).³⁶ As a consequence of the Act, the absolute membership of the Lords reduced from 1,325 Members at the end of the 1998–99 session, to 693 Members by the end of the 1999–00 session.³⁷ Of those 693, the number of male Members fell to a total of 583. Although the number of female Members had also decreased (from 118 to 110) the significant drop in male membership meant that the overall percentage of Members who were women almost doubled by the end of 1999–00, from 8.9 to 15.9 percent.³⁸

³⁶ House of Lords Library, [Women in the House of Lords](#), 30 June 2015, p 9.

³⁷ House of Lords Library, [Work of the House of Lords: Statistics](#), 16 March 2012, p 14.

³⁸ *ibid.*

Between 1963 and 1999, a total of 25 female hereditary Peers in their own right were admitted to the House of Lords.³⁹ Of the 92 hereditary Peers who remained Members under the terms of the House of Lords Act 1999, two were ex-officio Members, 15 were elected by the whole House and 75 were elected by their party groups. Of the 15 hereditary Peers who were elected by the whole House in 1999, one was a woman. The Countess of Mar remains an active member of the House today, having joined in 1975. Of the 75 Peers elected by their party groups, four were women, all elected by the Crossbench Peers, three of whom have since died and one who retired in December 2014 under the terms of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014. All were replaced by men through by-elections for hereditary Peers. No female hereditary Peers in their own right have been admitted to the House through by-elections.⁴⁰ As at 29 January 2018, only one female hereditary Peer (Baroness Dacre) was on the Register of Hereditary Peers, eligible to stand in by-elections.⁴¹ This was of a total of 206 hereditary Peers listed, as at 29 January 2018. In December 2015, Baroness Dacre became the first female to be listed.⁴²

All Women Shortlists: 2002

The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 enabled political parties to create all-women shortlists of candidates for elections.⁴³ The Act included a sunset clause, whereby the Act would expire at the end of 2015, unless extended. However, the Equality Act 2010 extended the period in which all-women shortlists may be used until 2030.⁴⁴

First Female Foreign Secretary: 2006

On 5 May 2006, Margaret Beckett (Labour) became the first woman appointed as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.⁴⁵

First Lord Speaker: 2006

The office of Lord Speaker was created following the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 when the historical roles of the Lord Chancellor were re-distributed and reformed.⁴⁶ The Lord Speaker is elected for a period of five

³⁹ House of Lords Library, [Women in the House of Lords](#), 30 June 2015, p 13.

⁴⁰ For background on the limitations on women succeeding to a hereditary peerage, see: House of Lords Library, [Succession to Peerages Bill \[HL\]](#), 8 September 2015.

⁴¹ Information provided by the House of Lords Journal Office.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ House of Commons Library, [All-Women Shortlists](#), 7 March 2016, p 4.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 11.

⁴⁶ The Lord Speaker presides over daily business in the House of Lords Chamber, supported by a panel of Deputy Speakers, and is an ambassador for the work of the House. The Lord Speaker also chairs the main domestic committee of the House: the House of Lords Commission (see: House of Lords Library, [Governance and Administration of the House of Lords](#), 12 December 2017; and [Principal Office Holders in the House of Lords](#), 9 March 2015).

years, renewable once.⁴⁷ The first Lord Speaker election took place in June 2006. On 4 July 2006, the Clerk of the Parliaments announced that Baroness Hayman had won the election, making her the first Lord Speaker.⁴⁸ To date, there have been three Lord Speakers, two of which were women. Baroness Hayman's speakership was followed by the election of Baroness D'Souza, in July 2011.

First Female Home Secretary: 2007

On 28 June 2007, Jacqui Smith (Labour) became the first woman appointed as Secretary of State for the Home Department.⁴⁹

Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015

The Lords Spiritual are the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England who have seats in the House of Lords.⁵⁰ The number of Bishops in the House of Lords is fixed at 26 and they are required to retire at 70. Of these, five (the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester) are automatically granted a seat. Prior to the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015, the remaining 21 took their seats on the basis of seniority in the Church of England. However, in November 2014, the Church of England adopted legislation to allow women to be ordained as Bishops for the first time. Shortly after, the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 was passed. The Act's provisions meant that when a vacancy arose, it would instead be filled by a female English diocesan Bishop (where there is one), ahead of any male. In the event that there are two eligible women Bishops, it would go to the woman whose appointment as a Bishop was confirmed first. The provisions in the Act will last ten years, from 2015 until 2025.

In the 2014–15 session, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, stated that the passing of the Act would mean that “at last this will be the last parliament where any Bench of either House is occupied solely by men”.⁵¹

First Female Lords Spiritual: 2015

On 7 September 2015, the first female Bishop, the Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek, joined the House of Lords. On 18 November 2015, the Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, was the second female Bishop to join the House.

⁴⁷ Standing Order 19).

⁴⁸ [HL Hansard, 4 July 2006, cols 121–7.](#)

⁴⁹ House of Commons Library, [Women in the House of Commons](#), 16 June 2017, p 11.

⁵⁰ House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Lords Spiritual](#), 4 September 2017, p 1; and [Women in the House of Lords](#), 30 June 2015, p 14.

⁵¹ [HL Hansard, 12 February 2015, col 1366.](#) For further information, see: House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Lords Spiritual](#), 4 September 2017; and [Lords Spiritual \(Women\) Bill](#), 3 February 2015.

First Female Lord Chancellor: 2016

Elizabeth Truss (Conservative) became the first female Lord Chancellor in July 2016.⁵²

First Female Black Rod: 2017

In November 2017, Sarah Clarke became the first woman to be appointed to the role of Black Rod.⁵³

⁵² Gov.uk, [‘The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP’](#), accessed 26 January 2018.

⁵³ UK Parliament website, [‘Sarah Clarke Appointed to the Role of Black Rod’](#), 17 November 2017.

2. Statistics

This section provides statistics on the current membership of each House. It also sets out figures which show the change in the composition of each House's membership over time. In addition, it provides current data on the Cabinet, as well as a selection of statistics on other areas of public life.

2.1 House of Lords

Membership of the Lords

As at 26 January 2018, there were 794 eligible Members of the House of Lords.⁵⁴ Of those 794 Members, 206 are women; 25.9 percent of the total membership. All but three of the 206 women Members are life Peers. Of the remaining three, one has a seat by virtue of being a hereditary Peer, and the other two are Bishops.

Table 2 shows the number of male and female Members of the Lords by party/group.

Table 2: Eligible Membership of the Lords by Gender and Party/Group

Party/Group	Men	Women	Total
Bishops	23	2	25
Conservative	187	61	248
Crossbench	142	41	183
Labour	134	63	197
Liberal Democrat	66	34	100
Non-affiliated	23	4	27
Democratic Unionist Party	3	0	3
Green Party	0	1	1
Independent Labour	2	0	2
Independent Social Democrat	1	0	1
Independent Ulster Unionist	1	0	1
Plaid Cymru	1	0	1
UK Independence Party	3	0	3
Ulster Unionist Party	2	0	2
Total	588	206	794

(Source: UK Parliament website, '[Lords by Party, Type of Peerage and Gender](#)', accessed 26 January 2018)

The figures show that Labour Members make up the highest number of women by party/group in the Lords at 29.6 percent of total female membership. However, the percentage of women within each party/group's

⁵⁴ UK Parliament website, '[Lords by Party, Type of Peerage and Gender](#)', accessed 26 January 2018.

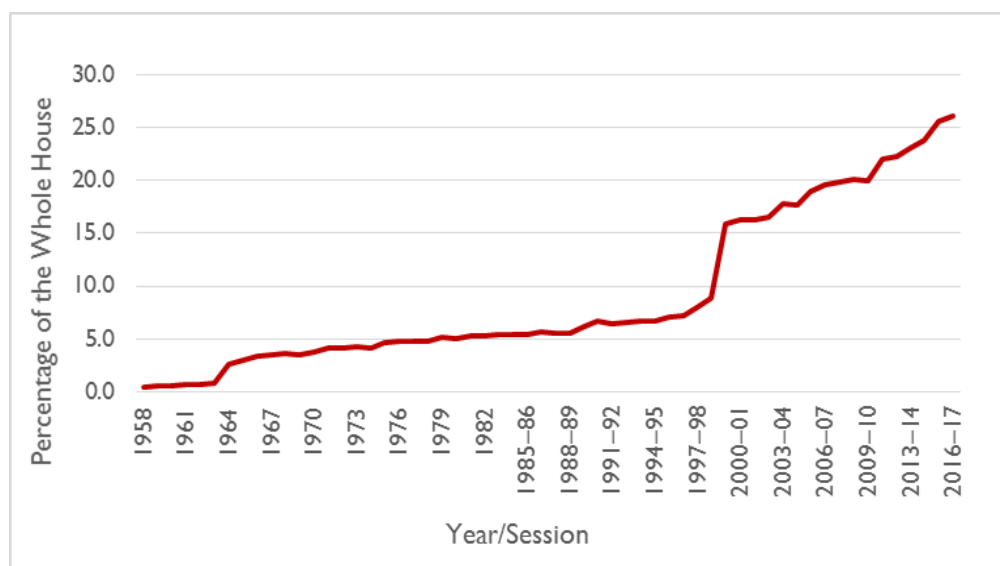
total eligible membership, as at 27 January 2018, is as follows:

- Liberal Democrat: 34 percent
- Labour: 32 percent
- Conservative: 25 percent
- Crossbench: 22 percent
- Bishops: 8 percent

Membership of the Lords: Total Percentage of Women, 1958 Onwards

Graph 1 shows the total percentage of female Members in the Lords over time, based on absolute membership.⁵⁵

Graph 1: Percentage of Women in the House of Lords—Absolute Membership, 1958 to 2017



(Source: Years 1958 to 1983: *Vachers Parliamentary Companion*, the final edition of each year; sessions 1984–5 to 2016–17: *House of Lords Sessional Returns*, as at end of each session; and House of Lords Journal Office.)

The data illustrates that the percentage of absolute membership of women in the Lords reached its highest level at the end of the most recent 2016–17 session, at 26.1 percent. The steepest rise in the percentage of women can be seen between the 1998–99 session and the 1999–00 session. This followed the House of Lords Act 1999, which saw a significant decrease in male membership and the overall percentage of women almost doubled, from 8.9 to 15.9 percent.

⁵⁵ Unlike the figures above (showing ‘eligible’ membership) absolute membership includes Members who have not taken the oath, are without writ of summons, are on leave of absence, are disqualified as senior members of the judiciary or are disqualified as an MEP.

Peerage Creations by Prime Minister

Table 3: Peerage Creations by Gender, by Prime Minister in Power⁵⁶

Prime Minister	Years	Men	Women	Total
Macmillan	1958–1963	83	7	90
Douglas-Home	1963–1964	27	2	29
Wilson	1964–1970	129	14	143
Heath	1970–1974	40	8	48
Wilson	1974–1976	72	11	83
Callaghan	1976–1979	55	5	60
Thatcher	1979–1990	189	27	216
Major	1990–1997	142	29	171
Blair	1997–2007	297	89	386
Brown	2007–2010	26	10	36
Cameron	2010–2016	162	83	245
May	2016–present	15	9	24
Total		1,237	294	1,531

(Source: House of Lords Library)

2.2 House of Commons

As at 26 January 2018, there were 208 female MPs. This amounts to 32 percent of all MPs and is the highest percentage ever reached.⁵⁷

The total number of female MPs by party, and the percentage of females within each party's total, are as follows⁵⁸:

- Labour: 119 (45 percent)
- Conservative: 67 (21 percent)
- SNP: 12 (34 percent)
- Liberal Democrat: 4 (33 percent)
- Sinn Féin: 2 (33 percent)
- Democratic Unionist Party: 1 (10 percent)
- Independent: 1 (20 percent)
- Plaid Cymru: 1 (25 percent)
- Green Party: 1 (100 percent)

⁵⁶ The Prime Minister in power at the time the peerage was announced may not necessarily be the Prime Minister who recommended the individual appointment.

⁵⁷ For further breakdown of figures for candidate by gender, party, marginality of seats, and candidates in winnable and safer seats by gender, see: House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017, pp 8–9.

⁵⁸ House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017, p 22; and Members' Name Information Service, '[House of Commons: Overview](#)', accessed 26 January 2018.

Since 1918, there have been 489 women elected as Members of the House of Commons. Three of them were elected as Sinn Féin MPs and did not take their seats.⁵⁹

Until December 2016, there had been fewer women MPs in total ever than there were men sitting in the House of Commons, at any one time.⁶⁰ When Dr Caroline Johnson won the Sleaford and North Hykeham by-election on 8 December 2016, she became the 455th woman to be elected as an MP. At the time, there were 455 male MPs in the House of Commons.

Table 4: Women MPs Elected at General Elections by Party, 1918 to 2017

	Con	Lab	LD	Other	Total	MPs (%)
1918	0	0	0	1	1	0
1922	1	0	1	0	2	0
1923	3	3	2	0	8	1
1924	3	1	0	0	4	1
1929	3	9	1	1	14	2
1931	13	0	1	1	15	2
1935	6	1	1	1	9	2
1945	1	21	1	1	24	4
1950	6	14	0	1	21	3
1951	6	11	0	0	17	3
1955	10	14	0	0	24	4
1959	12	13	0	0	25	4
1964	11	18	0	0	29	5
1966	7	19	0	0	26	4
1970	15	10	0	1	26	4
1974	9	13	0	1	23	4
1974	7	18	0	2	27	4
1979	8	11	0	0	19	3
1983	13	10	0	0	23	4
1987	17	21	2	1	41	6
1992	20	37	2	1	60	9
1997	13	101	3	3	120	18
2001	14	95	5	4	118	18
2005	17	98	10	3	128	20
2010	49	81	7	6	143	22
2015	68	99	0	24	191	29
2017	67	119	4	18	207	32

(Source: House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017, p 22)

⁵⁹ House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017, p 5.

⁶⁰ House of Commons Library, [Women Members of Parliament](#), 18 January 2018, p 3.

2.3 Current Cabinet

Table 5: Cabinet as at 24 January 2018

	Men	Women	Total	Women
Cabinet	17	6	23	26
Also attends cabinet	2	4	6	67
Total	19	10	29	34

(Source: Data provided by House of Commons Library, as at 24 January 2018)

2.4 Women in Wider Public Life

Public Appointments

The *Annual Report* for 2016/17 from the Commissioner for Public Appointments records that:

- The total percentage of public appointments (that is, appointments made by ministers, or in their name, to public bodies and advisory committees) and reappointments of female candidates was 45.5 percent, up 0.1 percent from the previous year.⁶¹ This continued an upward trend from five years ago, where the total number appointed and reappointed was 34 percent.
- 48.5 percent of all new appointments were women; reappointments to women were lower at 41.3 percent.
- 28 percent of female chairs were appointed, compared to 23 percent in 2015–16. This was slightly below the figure from 2014–15 and, according to the Commissioner, fell “a long way short”.⁶²

Civil Service

- In March 2017 women made up 54 percent of all civil service employees.⁶³
- The proportion of women in senior positions increased from 34 percent in 2010 to 41 percent in March 2017.
- In March 2016, seven of the 36 permanent secretaries across the

⁶¹ Commissioner for Public Appointments, *Annual Report 16/17*, p 12. For details on the wide range of appointments that are included in the Commissioner’s ‘public appointments’ see: Peter Riddell, ‘[What is a Public Appointment?](#)’, Commissioner for Public Appointments Blog, 27 June 2017. The figures for gender were taken from a higher number of returns than in previous years: 98 percent of appointed candidates declared their gender in 2016–17, compared to 87 percent in the previous year.

⁶² Commissioner for Public Appointments, *Annual Report 16/17*, p 13.

⁶³ According to headcount (source: House of Commons Library, *Women in Public Life, the Professions and the Boardroom*, 27 July 2017, p 8).

- civil service were women, representing 20 percent of the total.
- 82.1 percent of part-time civil servants in 2017 were women. This figure has decreased since 1981, when 95.6 percent were women.

The Judiciary

As at April 2017, 28 percent of judges in England and Wales were women.⁶⁴

The first female Lord of Appeal (Brenda Hale) was appointed in 2004.⁶⁵ Baroness Hale of Richmond was also the first woman to become President of the Supreme Court, and took her post in October 2017. Lady Justice Black also joined the Supreme Court as a Justice in October 2017.

Table 6: Female Judges in England and Wales by Post, 2001–2017⁶⁶

%

	Justice of the Supreme Court ¹	Heads of Division	Lord Justices of Appeal	High Court Judges	Circuit Judges	District Judges	District Judges (Magistrates Court)	Recorders	Total
2001	0.0	25.0	6.1	8.1	7.9	18.6	20.0	12.3	14.1
2002	0.0	25.0	5.9	5.6	9.3	19.5	20.2	12.2	14.4
2003	0.0	25.0	8.6	5.7	9.4	19.8	22.3	12.7	14.9
2004	8.3	20.0	5.4	7.6	9.5	21.5	21.4	13.3	15.8
2005	8.3	20.0	5.4	9.3	10.5	23.2	22.4	14.2	16.9
2006	8.3	0.0	8.1	10.3	11.3	25.4	22.3	14.2	18.0
2007	8.3	0.0	8.1	9.3	11.4	26.0	24.4	15.1	18.7
2008	8.3	0.0	8.1	10.0	13.3	25.5	23.4	14.9	18.6
2009	8.3	0.0	7.9	13.8	14.4	26.8	26.0	13.7	19.0
2010	9.1	0.0	8.1	14.8	14.9	27.2	26.5	16.3	20.1
2011	9.1	0.0	10.8	15.7	15.9	30.5	28.2	16.5	22.3
2012	8.3	0.0	10.5	15.5	17.1	30.4	29.1	16.3	22.6
2013	8.3	0.0	11.4	16.7	18.5	27.4	28.9	17.4	24.3
2014	8.3	0.0	18.4	17.9	20.5	33.0	31.0	16.5	24.5
2015	8.3	0.0	21.1	19.8	22.8	34.0	31.2	15.9	25.2
2016	8.3	0.0	20.5	20.8	25.6	36.0	32.0	20.0	27.5
2017	9.0	0.0	24.0	22.0	27.0	38.0	35.0	20.0	28.0

¹ Until October 2009 Lords of Appeal.

(Source: Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, [Judicial Diversity Statistics 2017](#), 20 July 2017; and House of Commons Library, [Women in Public Life, the Professions and the Boardroom](#), 27 July 2017, p 8)

⁶⁴ House of Commons Library, [Women in Public Life, the Professions and the Boardroom](#), 27 July 2017, p 10.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ These figures do not include the lay magistracy.

Police

- In 2017, of 123,142 officers in England and Wales 35,498 (29 percent) were female.⁶⁷ The proportion of female police officers has steadily increased from 19 percent in 2000.
- The first female Chief Constable in England and Wales was Pauline Clare, who was appointed to Lancashire police force in June 1995. As at July 2017, there were seven police forces with a female Chief Constable.
- Cressida Dick was appointed as the first female Metropolitan Police Commissioner in February 2017.
- In the 2016 elections for Police and Crime Commissioners, eight women were elected (20 percent), while 29 (15 percent) of candidates were women.

National Health Service

In 2015, women represented 54.2 percent of General Practitioners (GPs) and 34 percent of Hospital and Community Health Service consultants. Both increased, by 21 percentage points and 11 percentage points respectively, since 2000.⁶⁸

As at July 2017, women made up around 90 percent of qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors; and around 80 percent of other technical support positions.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ This figure included Central Service secondments, but excluded the British Transport Police, see: House of Commons Library, [Women in Public Life, the Professions and the Boardroom](#), 27 July 2017, p 15.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p 12.

⁶⁹ *ibid*.

3. Further Reading

- Committee on Standards in Public Life, [Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#), 13 December 2017, Cm 9543
- House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, [Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 Election](#), 10 January 2017, HC 60 of session 2016–17; and [Government Response](#), 7 September 2017, Cm 9492
- House of Lords Library, [Lords Membership: Lists of Current and Former Female Peers](#), 30 January 2018
- House of Commons Library, [Women Members of Parliament](#), 18 January 2018
- House of Commons Library, [Barriers for Women in Standing for Parliament](#), 12 September 2017
- For statistics on the representation of women in the devolved legislatures, see: House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), December 2017
- House of Commons Library, [Women in Public Life, the Professions and the Boardroom](#), 27 July 2017
- For a history of peerages before 1958, see: House of Lords Library, [The Life Peerages Act 1958](#), 21 April 2008
- For a detailed history of women in the House of Lords, see: Duncan Sutherland, 'Peeresses, Parliament and Prejudice: The Admission of Women to the House of Lords, 1918–1963', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 2000