



BRIEFING PAPER

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England, Scotland, Wales: MPs & voting in the House of Commons

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Summary

This briefing paper was first published 4 December 2014 following the [Scottish Independence Referendum](#), publication of the [Smith Commission Heads of Agreement](#) and proposals for “English votes for English laws”. It has now been updated to include the results of the May 2015 General Election and full division records for the 2010-15 Parliament.

This note analyses the geographic composition of governments and voting patterns of MPs representing England, Scotland and Wales in the House of Commons.

Six of 19 governments since 1945 have had a sufficient number of MPs in England to form a UK majority consisting of English MPs only. Of these six governments two were Labour administrations, three Conservative and one the current Coalition.

Among others, Churchill (1951), Thatcher (1979) and Blair (2001, 2005) required the support of MPs from multiple constituent countries of the UK to form a majority in the Commons. Of 19 governments since 1945, 16 (84%) have held a majority among English MPs.

Of approximately 3,800 divisions to occur between 26 June 2001 and 26 March 2015, 25 (0.7%) would have concluded differently had the votes of Scottish MPs not been counted.

In the 2010-15 Parliament the lobby in which the majority of English MPs have voted coincided with that of the majority of UK MPs for 99% of divisions. The majority of Scottish MPs has coincided with the majority of UK MPs for 26% of divisions; that of Welsh MPs for 28% of divisions.

The Library Standard Note [The English Question](#) provides further information on the legal and technical issues involved in identifying “England only” legislation.

1. Introduction

The Scottish Independence Referendum, publication of the Smith Commission's Heads of Agreement, proposals for "English votes for English laws" and the upcoming referendum of Britain's membership of the European Union have all brought renewed focus on constitutional change and representation at Westminster.

This note analyses the geographic voting patterns of MPs in the House of Commons, as well as the composition of Parliamentary parties and Governments by country and region.

Its principle source is the House of Commons Library divisions database, together with the Library Research Paper [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2012](#) and Rallings and Thrasher's *British Electoral Facts 1932-2006*. Across four sections this note analyses these data according to region and country with particular attention paid to England, Scotland and Wales.

Section 2 examines the geographic composition of governing UK parliamentary parties since 1945.

Section 3 provides data on MPs' participation rates since 2001, broken down by region and country.

Section 4 estimates the impact of removing Scottish MPs from Commons divisions since 2001 – divisions 'without Scotland'.

Section 5 further analyses divisions data by comparing the lobby within which the majority of MPs for England, Scotland and Wales have voted with the lobby within which the majority of UK MPs have voted.

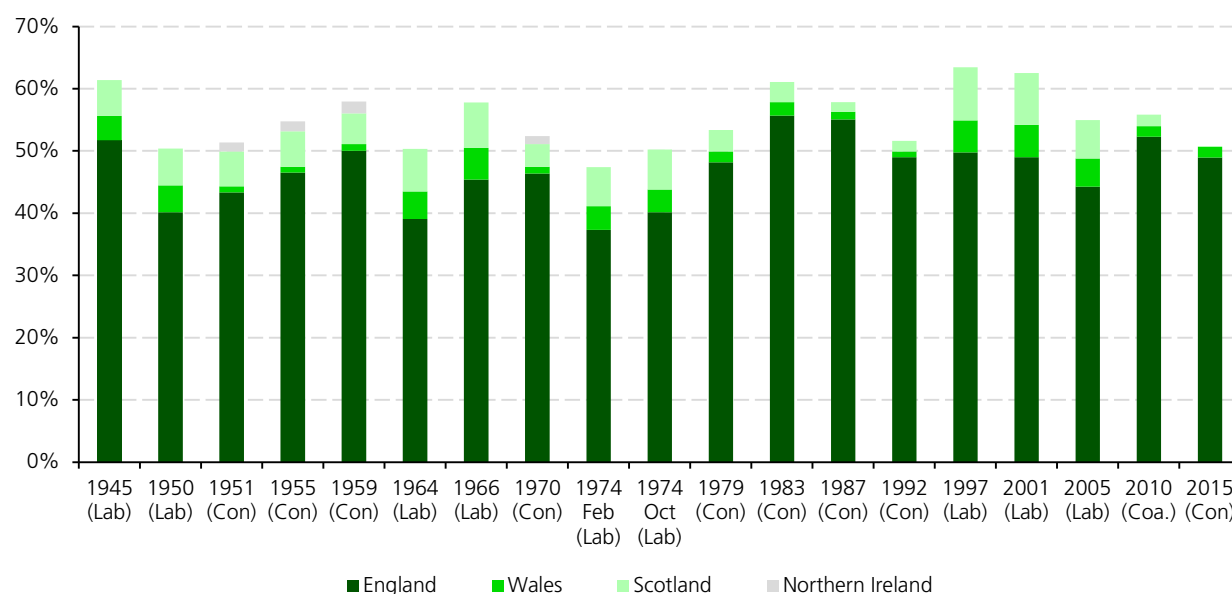
2. Geographic composition of governing parliamentary parties since 1945

This section analyses the composition by country of governing Parliamentary parties since 1945.

2.1 Government MPs holding English, Scottish and Welsh seats as a proportion of total UK MPs

Chart 1 shows the number and proportion of government MPs holding English, Welsh and Scottish seats as a proportion of total MPs sitting in the House of Commons. This data is based upon the make-up of the Commons immediately subsequent to each of 19 general elections since 1945.

Chart 1 Government MPs holding English, Scottish and Welsh seats as a proportion of total UK MPs



Notes

- 1- For elections up to 1992, the Speaker of the House of Commons is listed under the party they represented before their appointment.
- 2- National Liberal & Conservative MPs 1945-1970.

Sources

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1932-2006
 House of Commons Library Research Paper 12/43 '[UK Election Statistics: 1918-2012](#)' (7 August 2012)

There has been one post-war occasion only when the governing parties did not hold a UK majority; this was Harold Wilson's Labour government elected in February 1974.

Table 1 shows the data behind **chart 1**. The rightmost column of this table displays the number of English government MPs as a proportion of

all UK MPs. If this figure is equal to or greater than 50% a governing party/parties could, theoretically, achieve a Parliamentary majority consisting of English Members only. Governments scoring below 50% in this column would most likely require the support of Members from other constituent regions of the UK in addition to England.

Table 1 shows that:

- Six of 19 Governments since 1945 (one third) have held a sufficient number of MPs in England to form a UK majority consisting of English MPs only. Of these six government two were Labour administrations, three Conservative and one the 2010-15 Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition.
- 13 of 19 Governments (two thirds) have required the support of MPs from multiple countries of the UK in order to form a majority in the Commons. This includes 7 Labour and 6 Conservative administrations.
- Among others, Churchill (1951), Thatcher (1979) and Blair (2001, 2005) required the support of MPs from multiple constituent countries of the UK to form a majority in the Commons. Attlee (1945), Thatcher (1983, 1987) and the 2010-15 coalition government are among those which theoretically had a sufficient number of MPs in England alone to form a UK wide majority.

Table 1 Government MPs holding English, Scottish and Welsh seats as a proportion of total UK MPs

General Election	Government	No. Government MPs in...				Gov. MPs by country as % of UK MPs			
		England	Wales	Scotland	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	UK
1945	Labour	331	25	37	393	52%	4%	6%	61%
1950	Labour	251	27	37	315	40%	4%	6%	50%
1951	Conservative ²	271	6	35	321	43%	1%	6%	51%
1955	Conservative ²	293	6	36	345	47%	1%	6%	55%
1959	Conservative ²	315	7	31	365	50%	1%	5%	58%
1964	Labour	246	28	43	317	39%	4%	7%	50%
1966	Labour	286	32	46	364	45%	5%	7%	58%
1970	Conservative ²	292	7	23	330	46%	1%	4%	52%
1974 Feb	Labour	237	24	40	301	37%	4%	6%	47%
1974 Oct	Labour	255	23	41	319	40%	4%	6%	50%
1979	Conservative	306	11	22	339	48%	2%	3%	53%
1983	Conservative	362	14	21	397	56%	2%	3%	61%
1987	Conservative	358	8	10	376	55%	1%	2%	58%
1992	Conservative	319	6	11	336	49%	1%	2%	52%
1997	Labour	328	34	56	418	50%	5%	8%	63%
2001	Labour	323	34	55	412	49%	5%	8%	63%
2005	Labour	286	29	40	355	44%	4%	6%	55%
2010	Coalition	340	11	12	363	52%	2%	2%	56%
2015	Conservative	318	11	1	330	49%	2%	0%	51%

Notes

- 3- For elections up to 1992, the Speaker of the House of Commons is listed under the party they represented before their appointment.
- 4- National Liberal & Conservative MPs 1945-1970.

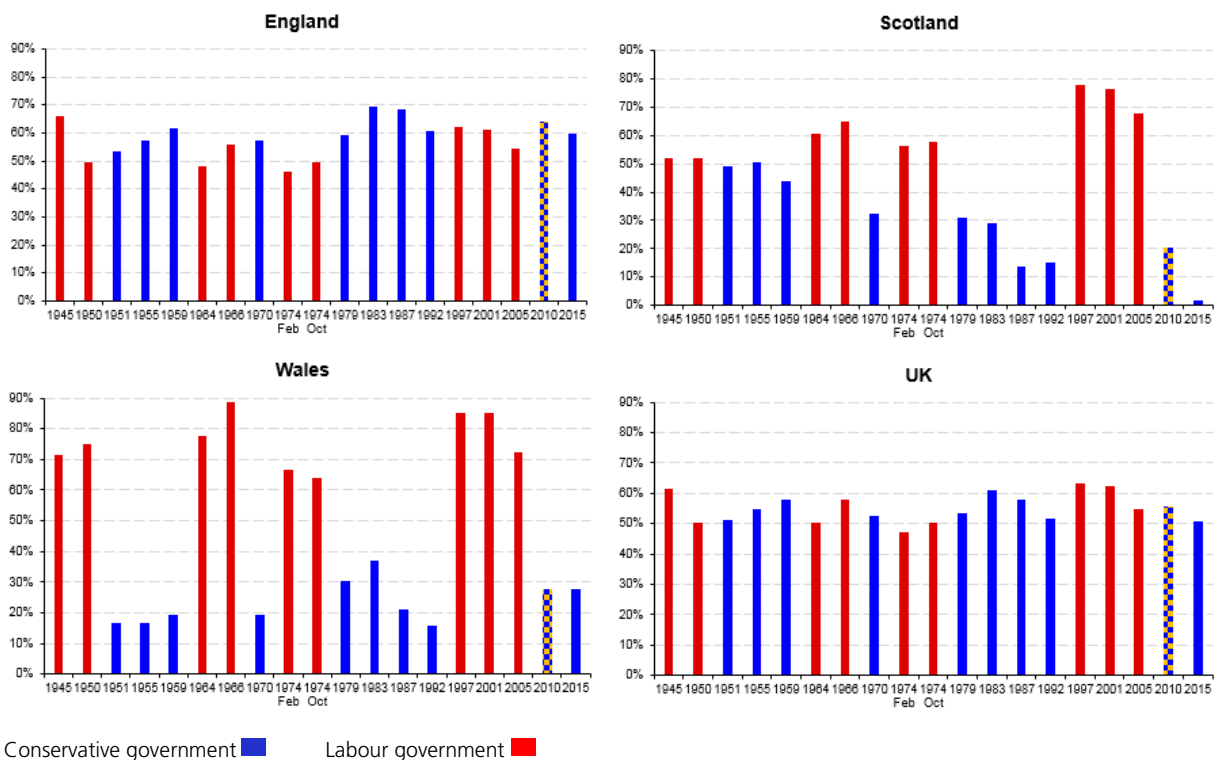
Sources

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1932-2006
House of Commons Library Research Paper 12/43 '[UK Election Statistics: 1918-2012](#)' (7 August 2012)

2.2 Government seats as a proportion of total seats in each of England, Scotland and Wales

Chart 2 shows government seats as a proportion of total seats for selected constituent countries within the UK. The proportion of seats held by a governing party/parties per country within the UK does not currently impact upon procedure within the House of Commons. This nonetheless serves as an indicator of how representative governments since 1945 have been of MPs elected in each of the countries that make-up the UK.

Chart 2 Government seats as a proportion of total seats in each named country



Notes

- 1- For elections up to 1992, the Speaker of the House of Commons is listed under the party they represented before their appointment.
- 2- National Liberal & Conservative MPs 1945-1970.

Sources

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1932-2006
 House of Commons Library Research Paper 12/43 '[UK Election Statistics: 1918-2012](#)' (7 August 2012)

Chart 2 shows:

- Of 19 governments since 1945, 16 (84%) have held a majority among English MPs.
- Each of the three governments since 1945 which did not hold a majority among English MPs were Labour administrations; these

were the governments elected in 1964, February 1974 and October 1974.

- Of 19 governments since 1945, nine (47%) have held a majority in Wales. Of those governments that have not held a majority in Wales nine were Conservative administrations and one the 2010-15 coalition government.
- Of 19 governments since 1945, 10 (53%) have held a majority in Scotland.
- Of 19 governments since 1945, nine (47%) have not held a majority in Scotland. Of those governments that have not held a majority in Scotland eight were Conservative administrations and one the 2010-15 coalition government.

2.3 Government MPs by country of seat

Table 2 displays government MPs by country of seat.

Table 2 Government MPs by country of seat

General Election	Government	Number Government MPs in...				Proportion of Gov. seats in...		
		England	Wales	Scotland	UK	England	Wales	Scotland
1945	Labour	331	25	37	393	84%	6%	9%
1950	Labour	251	27	37	315	80%	9%	12%
1951	Conservative ²	271	6	35	321	84%	2%	11%
1955	Conservative ²	293	6	36	345	85%	2%	10%
1959	Conservative ²	315	7	31	365	86%	2%	8%
1964	Labour	246	28	43	317	78%	9%	14%
1966	Labour	286	32	46	364	79%	9%	13%
1970	Conservative ²	292	7	23	330	88%	2%	7%
1974 Feb	Labour	237	24	40	301	79%	8%	13%
1974 Oct	Labour	255	23	41	319	80%	7%	13%
1979	Conservative	306	11	22	339	90%	3%	6%
1983	Conservative	362	14	21	397	91%	4%	5%
1987	Conservative	358	8	10	376	95%	2%	3%
1992	Conservative	319	6	11	336	95%	2%	3%
1997	Labour	328	34	56	418	78%	8%	13%
2001	Labour	323	34	55	412	78%	8%	13%
2005	Labour	286	29	40	355	81%	8%	11%
2010	Coalition	340	11	12	363	94%	3%	3%
2015	Conservative	324	12	2	338	96%	4%	1%

Notes

- 3- For elections up to 1992, the Speaker of the House of Commons is listed under the party they represented before their appointment.
- 4- National Liberal & Conservative MPs 1945-1970.

Sources

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1932-2006
House of Commons Library Research Paper 12/43 '[UK Election Statistics: 1918-2012](#)' (7 August 2012)

3. Members' participation rates by region and country 2001-2014

This section will be updated shortly to include data for the full 2014-15 Parliamentary session.

This section measures MPs' participation rates as reflected by their having voted in divisions of the House of Commons.

Members' participation rates provide further insight into the engagement of different regions and countries – via their elected MPs – with Parliamentary activities. A generally high participation rate for MPs of a given country/party may suggest that country/party is particularly engaged by or dominant within Commons activities; a generally low participation rate may suggest a country/party is seldom engaged by Commons debate or is deliberately boycotting a range of Commons divisions.

3.1 Members of Parliament by region and country

Participation data within this sub-section is derived from the House of Commons Library's Divisions Database. This database records the way in which an MP voted (be that Aye or No, acting as a Teller, voting both ways or not voting) for each Commons division. Participation rates are calculated by finding the number of divisions in which an MP has voted as a proportion of total Commons divisions.

Table 3 displays data on members' average participation by region and country per Parliament.

Northern Ireland consistently has the lowest average participation rate, scoring the lowest rate for any of the three Parliaments in this series (22% in the 2005-10 Parliament) and an average participation rate across these three Parliaments of 27%. Note, however, that the average participation rate for Northern Irish MPs is reduced by the decision of Sinn Fein MPs not to take their seats in the Commons.

Across the three Parliaments Welsh MPs have the highest average participation rate (72%). The average participation rate for Scottish MPs was 63%, below the Commons average across these three Parliaments of 67%. The average participation rate for all MPs in the 2001-05 and 2005-10 Parliaments was 66%; average participation in the current Parliament has so far been higher at 70%.

The average participation rate for English MPs across these three Parliaments was 69%. Within England participation rates across these three Parliaments were lowest for MPs from the South East and Yorkshire and the Humber (67%) and highest (70%) for the East Midlands, North East, North West, South West and West Midlands. The lowest average participation rate of English MPs for any Parliament within this series was the average of 63% for South East MPs in the 2005-10 Parliament.

Table 4 Average MP participation by Parliament by region & country

Region	2001-05	2005-10	2010-14
East Midlands	69%	70%	72%
East of England	65%	64%	75%
London	67%	69%	72%
North East	66%	70%	74%
North West	70%	71%	71%
South East	66%	63%	73%
South West	67%	67%	75%
West Midlands	67%	70%	73%
Yorkshire and The Humber	65%	68%	68%
England	67%	68%	72%
Scotland	63%	64%	62%
Wales	70%	73%	72%
Northern Ireland	28%	22%	30%
House of Commons	66%	66%	70%

Source: *House of Commons Library Divisions Database*

Notes: Speakers and Deputy Speakers are not included in participation calculations.

3.2 Members of Parliament by party

Table 5 displays the average participation rates of MPs by party per Parliament.

The rate of participation in divisions is generally higher for MPs of governing parties. The Green Party has the highest participation rate (77%) of any party represented within the Commons in any one of these three Parliaments.

Excluding Independents and Northern Irish parties, Respect has the lowest participation rate across these three Parliaments (9%). Note that both the Green Party and Respect Party have had one Member of Parliament only at any given time. The SNP has the second lowest average participation rate across these three Parliaments of 45%; this is likely to be connected to the voluntary abstention of SNP MPs from divisions regarded as impacting upon England only.

Table 5 Average MP participation by party

Party	2001-05	2005-10	2010-14
Alliance			51%
Conservative	64%	61%	75%
Democratic Unionist	38%	34%	41%
Green			77%
Independent	15%	30%	31%
Independent Conservative	36%	9%	
Independent Labour	0%	8%	
Independent Unionist	13%		
Labour	69%	74%	69%
Liberal Democrat	66%	65%	70%
Plaid Cymru	67%	58%	67%
Respect	4%	7%	15%
Scottish National	45%	41%	47%
Sinn Féin	0%	0%	0%
Social Democratic & Labour	4%	22%	48%
Ulster Unionist	49%	25%	
House of Commons	66%	66%	70%

Source: *House of Commons Library Divisions Database*

Notes: Speakers and Deputy Speakers are not included in participation calculations.

4. 'Without Scotland': divisions since 2001

The impact of removing or constraining the votes of Scottish MPs on selected Commons divisions has been subject to particular media and political attention following the Scottish Independence Referendum of 18 September 2014. This section analyses the impact on Commons divisions of removing the votes of Scottish MPs – literally, divisions 'without Scotland's MPs'. Calculations within this section are hypothetical: we cannot account for the role individual Members holding Scottish seats may had in influencing their English, Welsh and Northern Irish colleagues in any given division.

Data within this and the following section is derived from the House of Commons Library Divisions Database. These data may differ from those of other sources, such as those held by [mySociety](#). This is due to different methods of data capture as well as differences in the way MPs who act as Tellers in each division are accounted for. Within this analysis Tellers for the Ayes and the Noes are excluded from the total count of MPs voting in each lobby.¹

Table 6 displays Commons divisions that would have been different since the 2001 General Election had the votes of Scottish Members not been counted. Only divisions the result of which would have been different without the votes of Scottish MPs are displayed.

Table 6 Commons divisions that would have been different without Scotland's MPs 26 June 2001 – 26 March 2014

Date	Div No	Session	Reference	'rUK' vote
29/10/2002	339	2001-02	Modernisation of the House of Commons	Would have opposed
04/02/2003	78	2002-03	House of Lords Reform	Would have favoured
19/11/2003	381	2002-03	Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill	Would have opposed
27/01/2004	38	2003-04	Higher Education Bill	Would have opposed
31/03/2004	123	2003-04	Higher Education Bill	Would have been tied
22/04/2004	139	2003-04	Security Screen	Would have favoured
28/02/2005	101	2004-05	Prevention of Terrorism	Would have favoured
02/11/2005	74	2005-06	Terrorism Bill	Would have favoured

¹ For further discussion of the matter of Tellers see mySociety's blog, [Considering the Treatment of Tellers](#). In their calculation mySociety opted for an alternative method to that used in this note and include Tellers in their total count of MPs voting per lobby.

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02/11/2005	75	2005-06	Terrorism Bill	Would have favoured
15/03/2006	193	2005-06	Education and Inspections Bill (Programme)	Would have opposed
02/06/2008	206	2007-08	Planning Bill, Question put, that the clause be read a second time	Would have favoured
11/06/2008	219	2007-08	Counter-terrorism Bill	Would have opposed
12/11/2008	317	2007-08	Regional Accountability, Amendment C	Would have favoured
12/11/2008	323	2007-08	Regional Accountability, Amendment A	Would have favoured
08/12/2008	2	2008-09	Speaker's Committee on the Search of Offices on the Parliamentary Estate	Would have favoured
09/11/2009	241	2008-09	Coroners and Justice Bill Amendment (a)	Would have favoured
24/02/2010	86	2009-10	Energy Bill, Proceedings interrupted	Would have favoured
24/04/2012	534	2010-12	Food Labelling (Halal and Kosher Meat): Motion for leave to bring in bill	Would have favoured
31/10/2012	91	2012-13	Multiannual Financial Framework: Motion Amendment (a) proposed	Would have opposed
29/01/2013	146	2012-13	Electoral Registration and Administration Bill: consideration of Lords Amendment	Would have favoured
29/08/2013	70	2013-14	Syria and the use of Chemical Weapons	Would have favoured
05/09/2014	48	2014-15	Affordable Homes Bill – that the Bill be committed to a Select Committee	Would have favoured
18/11/2014	82	2014-15	Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill — New Clause 2 — Pubs Code	Would have opposed
21/01/2015	134	2014-15	Onshore Wind Turbine Subsidies (Abolition)	Would have favoured
26/03/2015	188	2014-15	Elections for position in the House, secret ballot for re-election of a Speaker	Would have favoured

Table 7 displays the total number and percentage of Commons divisions per Session and Parliament that would have been different without Scotland, summarising those votes contained in **Table 6**.

Of approximately 3,800 divisions between 26 June 2001 and 26 March 2015, 25 (0.7%) would have concluded differently had the votes of Scottish MPs not been counted. This includes one, on 31 March 2004, that would have been 'tied'. The result of tied divisions is ultimately determined by the Speaker, a hypothetical decision for which we cannot account here. Of these 25 divisions seven occurred in the 2001-05 Parliament, 10 in the 2005-10 Parliament and eight in the 2010-15 Parliament.

Table 7 Number and % of Commons divisions per Session & Parliament that would have been different without Scotland's MPs 26 June 2001 – 26 March 2015

Period	Number of divisions		%
	per period	different without Scotland	
Session			
2001-02	361	1	0.3%
2002-03	390	2	0.5%
2003-04	340	3	0.9%
2004-05	155	1	0.6%
2005-06	343	3	0.9%
2006-07	221	0	0.0%
2007-08	341	4	1.2%
2008-09	248	2	0.8%
2009-10	135	1	0.7%
2010-12	544	1	0.2%
2012-13	227	2	0.9%
2013-14	280	1	0.4%
2014-15	188	4	2.1%
Parliament			
2001-05	1246	7	0.6%
2005-10	1288	10	0.8%
2010-15	1239	8	0.6%
Total	3773	25	0.7%

Source: House of Commons Library divisions database

5. Matching majorities: geographic voting patterns in the Commons?

An alternative method of analysing geographic voting patterns within the House of Commons is to compare, for each division, the majority opinion of MPs per constituent country of the UK to that of the UK majority.

Table 8 examines the percentage of times in which, since 2001, the majority of MPs per named country have voted in the same lobby as the UK majority. (For example, the table analyses the number of times the majority of English MPs have agreed with the majority of UK MPs participating in a division). 'Matched' denotes when the majority of a given country coincided with the UK majority, 'opposed' when they differed.

Table 8 Commons majority per country per division compared to UK majority per division 26 June 2001 – 26 March 2015

% total divisions

Parliament	England		Scotland		Wales	
	Matched	Opposed	Matched	Opposed	Matched	Opposed
2001-05	99%	1%	98%	2%	99%	1%
2005-10	98%	2%	98%	2%	99%	1%
2010-15	99%	1%	26%	74%	28%	72%

Source: House of Commons Library divisions database

The table shows that under the Labour governments of 2001-05 the lobby in which the majority of English MPs voted matched with the decision of the UK majority for 99% of divisions; in 2005-10 these majorities matched for 98% of divisions. Under the present coalition the lobby in which the majority of English MPs voted has matched the lobby in which the majority of UK MPs voted for 99% of divisions.

In both the 2001-05 and 2005-10 parliaments the lobby in which the majority of Scottish MPs voted matched the lobby in which the majority of UK MPs voted for 98% of divisions. The majority of Welsh MPs voted in the same lobby as the UK majority for 99% of divisions during both Parliaments.

In the 2010-15 parliament the lobby in which the majority of Scottish MPs voted matched the lobby in which the majority of UK MPs voted on 26% of occasions only. Over the same period, the lobby in which the majority of Welsh MPs voted matched that of the majority of UK MPs for 28% of divisions.

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