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Social background of MPs 1979-2019



Summary

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Summary

This briefing provides data on the gender, age, ethnicity and educational backgrounds of MPs elected at the 2019 General Election and how this has changed since 1979. It is based on data largely from the Members Names Information Service as well as the 'British General Election of ...' series of books.

Who is in the Commons?

- There were 220 female MPs elected at the 2019 General Election (34% of all MPs). This was the highest ever number and proportion. In 1979 there were 19 women elected, 3% of the total.
- Since 1979, the average age of MPs has remained around 50 years. 49% of MPs elected in 2019 were aged over 50. MPs aged 18 to 29 and those over 70 each represented 3% of the total.
- In 2019, 65 MPs were from minority ethnic backgrounds, 10% of the total. This was an increase of 25% compared to 52 in 2017. In contrast, there were four ethnic minority MPs elected in 1987. Currently, around 15% of the UK population is from a minority ethnic background¹.
- Conservative MPs elected at the 2019 General Election were the most likely to have attended a fee-paying school: 44% compared to 38% Liberal Democrat, 19% Labour and 8% SNP.

Who returned and who was new?

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

- 495 of 650 (76%) were MPs at the dissolution of the 2017 Parliament and were re-elected;
- 140 of 650 (22%) were first elected in 2019 having no previous House of Commons experience.

¹ The figure is taken from the Annual Population Survey data set June 2020-21. The term 'minority ethnic' includes the following groups: Asian/Asian British, Black/Caribbean/Africa/Black British, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, Any other ethnic groups.

- In addition, 15 MPs elected in 2019, who had previously been MPs but were not when Parliament dissolved, returned after a break.

Further data on UK elections prior to 1979 is available in the [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2021 – A century of elections](#) Commons Library briefing.

Terminology and data

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

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Gender

‘Gender’ rather than ‘sex’ is used in this chapter as this is the classification provided by the Members Names Information Service from which this data is taken.

220 female MPs were elected at the 2019 General Election (34% of all MPs), This is the highest ever number and proportion.

There were 19 female MPs in 1979, 3% of the total. The number of female MPs rose slowly over the next three parliaments to 60 in 1992 and doubled to 120 in 1997, following Labour’s election victory. That number fell back to 118 at the 2001 election but rose again at each subsequent general election.

Men and women MPs 1979 to 2019

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

Source: , Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge ,The British General Election of 2019, 2021 and previous editions,p400 [Women in the House of Commons](#). Commons Library Briefing CBP-6651

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

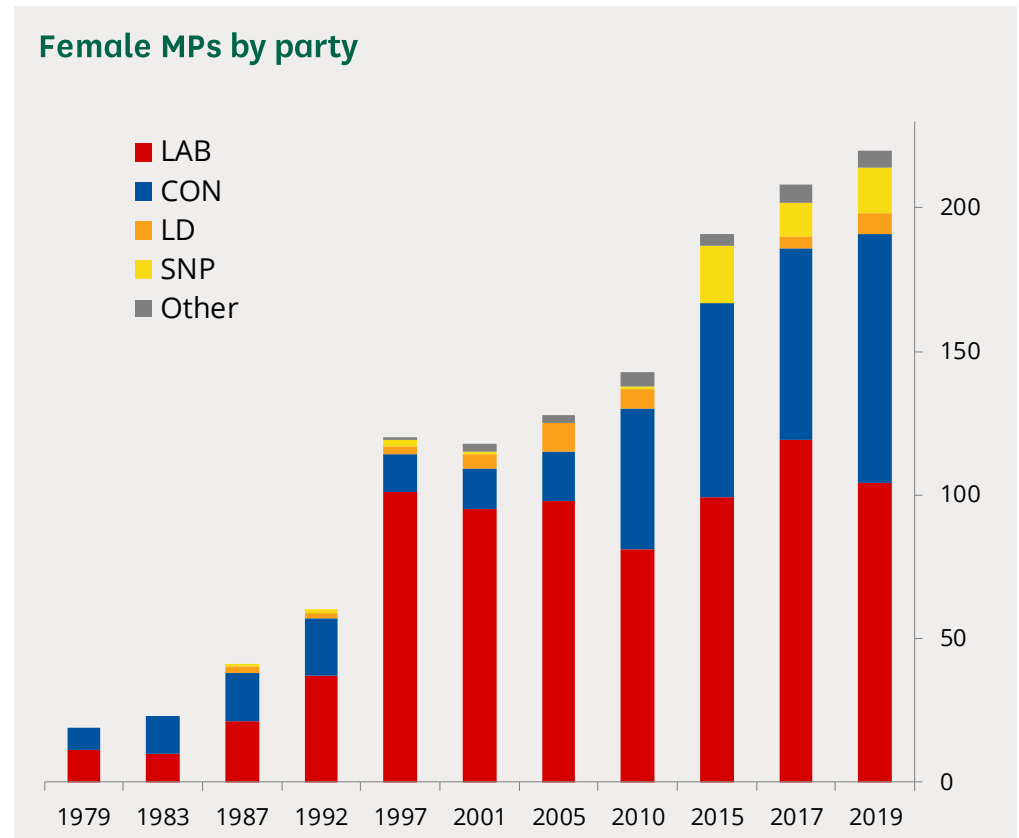
Female MPs by party						
	LAB	CON	LD	SNP	Other	Total
Number						
1979	11	8	0	0	0	19
1983	10	13	0	0	0	23
1987	21	17	2	1	0	41
1992	37	20	2	1	0	60
1997	101	13	3	2	1	120
2001	95	14	5	1	3	118
2005	98	17	10	0	3	128
2010	81	49	7	1	5	143
2015	99	68	0	20	4	191
2017	119	67	4	12	6	208
2019	104	87	7	16	6	220
Percentage						
1979	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%	3%
1983	5%	3%	0%	0%	0%	4%
1987	9%	5%	9%	33%	0%	6%
1992	14%	6%	10%	33%	0%	9%
1997	24%	8%	7%	33%	4%	18%
2001	23%	8%	10%	20%	13%	18%
2005	28%	9%	16%	0%	12%	20%
2010	31%	16%	12%	17%	22%	22%
2015	43%	21%	0%	36%	17%	29%
2017	45%	21%	33%	34%	25%	32%
2019	51%	24%	64%	33%	25%	34%

Source: Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge, The British General Election of 2019 p405, & previous editions; [Women in Politics in public life](#), Commons Library briefing CBP-7186.

The chart below shows the number of female MPs since 1979 by party. The highest increase was recorded after the 1997 General Election when 101 female Labour MPs were elected, compared to 37 in 1992. Female representation among Conservative MPs rose more slowly, although there was a significant increase in the 2010 election from 17 to 49, when the total number of Conservative MPs increased from 198 to 307.

In 2019, the number of female Conservative MPs increased by 20 to 87, 24% of all Conservative MPs. The 2019 General Election was the first time when

Labour had more female than male MPs (51%). Although, the total number of female Labour MPs decreased from 119 in 2017 to 104 in 2019.



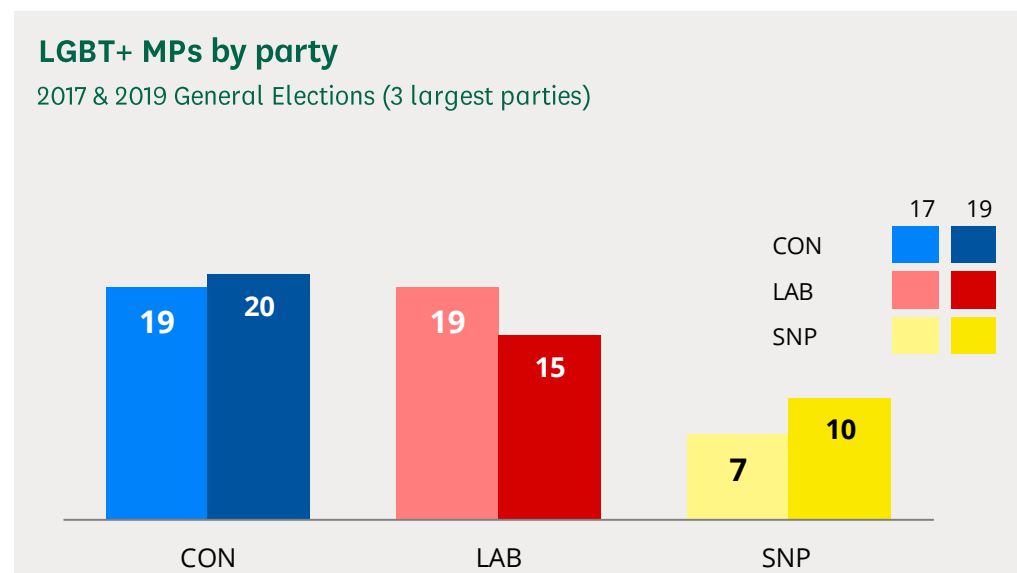
Source: [Women in the House of Commons](#), Commons Library Briefing no 06651, [General Election 2019: full results and analysis](#), Commons Library briefing CBP-8741,

2

LGBT+

There are no official data on the sexual orientation or transgender identity of MPs. PinkNews, a UK-based online newspaper marketed to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, identified 46 openly LGBT+ MPs elected at the 2019 General Election.² This was one fewer than their figure for 2017 and an increase of five from the 2015 General Election.

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



Source: Pink News, [The UK just elected a record number of LGBTQ people to Parliament](#), 9 June 2017, [The UK's parliament is still the gayest in the world after 2019 election](#), 13 December 2019.

² [The UK's parliament is still the gayest in the world after 2019 election](#), 13 December 2019

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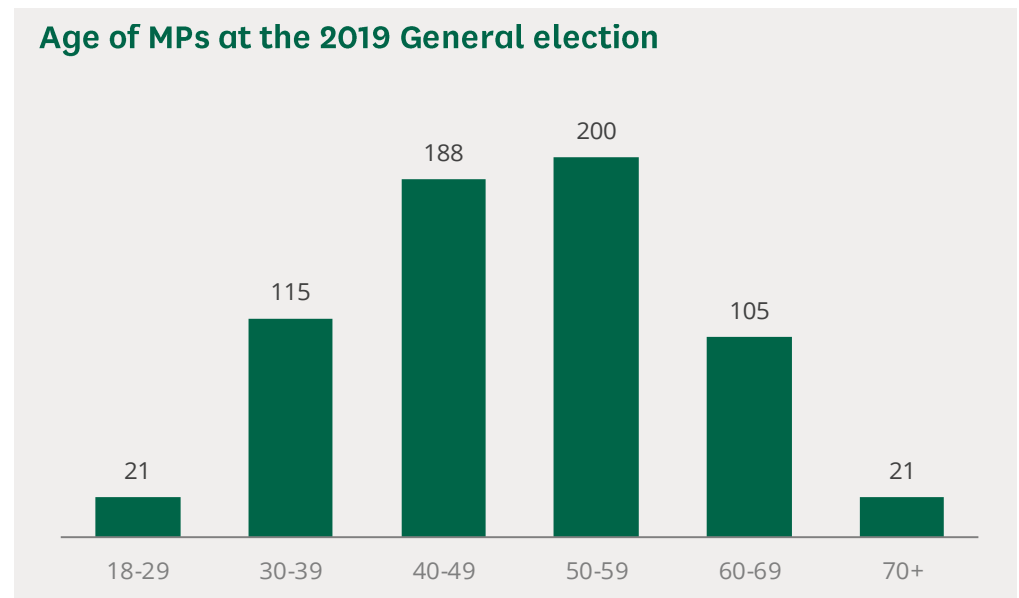
Age

In the period from 1979 to 2019, the average age of MPs at elections has been consistently around 50 years³. In 1997, the average age was 49.6 years. This rose to 51.2 in 2005. In 2010, the average dropped again to 49.9, but by 2017 it had risen again to 51.1. In the 2019 General Election there was a fall to 49.7, the youngest House of Commons since 1997.

In 2019, 49% of MPs were aged over 50. MPs aged 18-29 and those over 70 each represented 3% of the total. As of December 2021, verified information about age was not yet available for 101 MPs - mostly those first elected at the 2019 General Election. Age data for these MPs has been gathered from a variety of public sources⁴. For this reason, **data for 2019 should be considered provisional**.

In 2019, 50% (326) of those elected were aged over 50. This is 3% lower than in 2017 but similar to 2010 where 331 MPs were aged over 50 (51%). However, the peak was 2005, where 363 out of 646 MPs (56%) were over 50. In 1987, only 282 MPs were over 50 (43% of MPs). The proportion of MPs aged 70 and over increased from 2.5% (16) in 2010 to 3.2% in 2019. This is 1.3% lower than 2017 which had the highest share of MPs over 70 since 1979. The last three elections have resulted in the largest percentages of MPs under 30 since 1979 (2.3% in 2015, 2.0% in 2017 and 3.2% in 2019).

Age of MPs at the 2019 General election



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

³ Source: Members Names Information service (MNIS)

⁴ The major public source was Wikipedia

Ages of MPs elected at general elections, 1979-2019

Election	age at election (Years)	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Total
1979	49.6	6	120	205	203	87	14	635
1983	48.8	10	120	223	201	86	9	649
1987	49.0	4	112	252	197	79	6	650
1992	50.0	1	82	259	211	95	3	651
1997	49.3	10	92	255	225	69	8	659
2001	50.3	4	79	236	247	83	10	659
2005	51.2	3	89	191	249	100	14	646
2010	49.9	14	112	193	218	98	15	650
2015	50.6	15	92	209	214	98	22	650
2017	51.1	13	104	189	201	115	28	650
2019	49.7	21	115	188	200	105	21	650

Note: As of March 2020, verified information about age was not available for 101 MPs mostly those first elected at the 2019 General Election. Age data for the 101 MPs has been gathered from a variety of public sources including Wikipedia and various media outlets including the Guardian and the Telegraph.

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

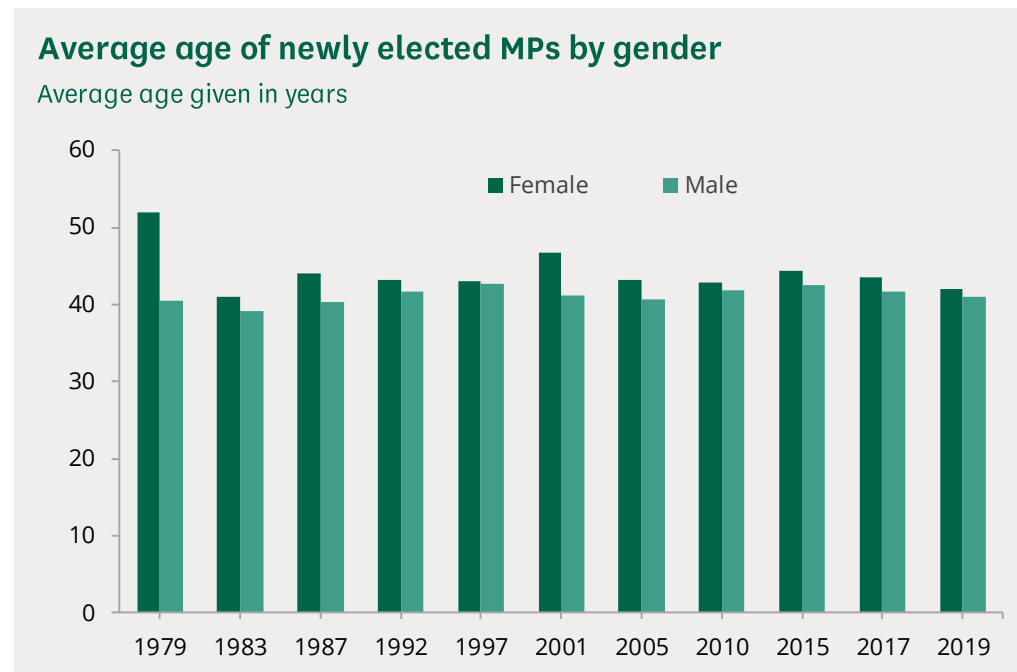
Based on available data for 2019, Labour has a higher proportion of MPs over the age of 60 than other major parties. 25% of Labour MPs are aged over 60 compared to 17% of Scottish National Party MPs, 16% of Conservatives, and 9% of Liberal Democrats.

Age of MPs elected at the 2019 General Election by party							
	Age group						
	Total MPs	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
Number							
CON	365	10	64	115	118	47	11
LAB	202	6	34	51	59	43	9
SNP	47	3	10	13	13	7	1
LD	11	0	2	4	4	1	0
Other	25	2	5	5	6	7	0
Total	650	21	115	188	200	105	21
Percentage							
CON	56%	3%	18%	32%	32%	13%	3%
LAB	31%	3%	17%	25%	29%	21%	4%
SNP	7%	6%	21%	28%	28%	15%	2%
LD	2%	0%	18%	36%	36%	9%	0%
Other	4%	8%	20%	20%	24%	28%	0%
Total	100%	3%	18%	29%	31%	16%	3%

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

Between 1979 and 2019, the average age of first-time MPs varied between a low of 39 years in the 1983 election and a high of 43 years in the 1997 and 2015 elections. In the 2019 election, the average age of newly elected MPs was 42 years.⁵ Apart from 1997, the average age of first-time female MPs has remained higher than men, as demonstrated in the chart below:

⁵ House of Commons Library, Members' Names Information Service (MNIS). For a small number of MPs, MNIS does not contain an exact date of birth so some dates of birth have been based on other publicly available sources.



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

4 Ethnicity

There is no official data on the ethnicity of MPs. As an individual's ethnicity is self-defined, it is hard to obtain reliable data on MPs' ethnicity if they have not done so, particularly historically. It is generally stated that the first MPs from minority ethnic groups since 1945 were elected in 1987, when four Labour MPs were from a minority ethnic background.⁶

According to analysis from British Future and Operation Black Vote, 65 MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds were elected at the 2019 General Election. This represents 10% of all MPs and is the highest number and proportion of minority ethnic MPs returned at a general election to date.⁷ By contrast, it is estimated that around 14% of the UK population is from a minority ethnic group.⁸

Between 1987 and 2019, Labour had the highest number and proportion of minority ethnic MPs. Of the 65 MPs from minority ethnic groups elected in 2019, 63% were Labour.

5. Black and Minority Ethnic MPs elected at General Elections

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

Source: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, British Electoral Facts 1832-2006, [British Future](#) (2019), [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2019](#), Commons Library Briefing CBP-7529.

⁶ For example, see the blog by British Future, [The class of 2015 enter Britain's most diverse ever parliament](#) (8 May 2015). There were a small number of 19th century MPs from minority ethnic groups, as explained on the Parliament website, [Pioneers: The First Asian and Black MPs](#), accessed 3 September 2019.

⁷ British Future, 'Diversity Milestone' as one in ten now from an ethnic minority background, 13 December 2019

⁸ NOMIS, [Annual Population Survey](#), June 2020 to June 2021 dataset. See footnote 1 for group breakdowns.

The first MP from a minority ethnic background, elected at a post war general election for a party other than Labour and the Conservatives, was Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, for the SNP. Her seat was in Ochil and South Perthshire in 2015 but she did not retain her seat in 2017.

The Liberal Democrats gained one female minority ethnic MP, Layla Moran in 2017. She is the first minority ethnic Liberal Democrat to be elected at a general election (Parmjit Singh Gill was elected for the Liberal Democrats at a 2004 by-election but did not retain the seat in the 2005 General Election).

5

Parliamentary experience

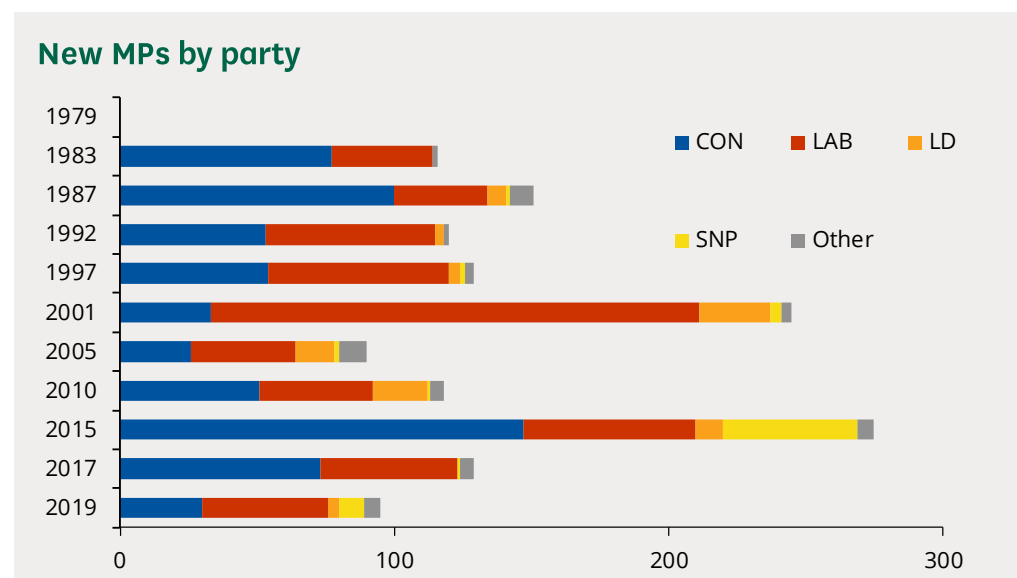
In the 2019 General Election, 140 MPs were elected for the first time. 27% of both Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs were new to Parliament followed by 14% of Labour MPs.

The table below shows the number of MPs new to the House of Commons at general elections since 1979. At the 1997 and 2010 elections, over a third of MPs elected were new to the House. The high turnover of MPs on these occasions is attributable to both loss of seats by sitting MPs and the number of MPs from the previous Parliament who did not seek re-election. In 1997, 117 MPs stood down and in 2010, 149 MPs chose not to stand.⁹

Historically, a record number of first-time MPs were elected in the 1945 General Election. 324 out of 640 MPs (51%) had no prior experience of the House of Commons.¹⁰

At three general elections since 1979, the SNP had the largest proportion of new MPs (in 1987, 2001 and 2015).

88% or 49 of the 59 SNP MPs elected at the 2015 General Election were new to Parliament. This is the highest proportion of new MPs recorded by any party since 1979.



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

⁹ David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997*; House of Commons Library Research Paper RP10/36, *General Election 2010*

¹⁰ J.F.S. Ross, *Elections and Electors*, 1955, p387

MPs entering House of Commons for first time at general elections

	New MPs						% of MPs who are new						Total MPs elected					
	CON	LAB	LD	SNP	Other	Total	CON	LAB	LD	SNP	Other	Total	CON	LAB	LD	SNP	Other	Total
1979	77	37	0	0	2	116	23%	14%	0%	0%	13%	18%	339	268	11	2	15	635
1983	100	34	7	0	9	150	25%	16%	30%	0%	47%	23%	397	209	23	2	19	650
1987	53	62	3	1	2	121	14%	27%	14%	33%	10%	19%	375	229	22	3	21	650
1992	54	66	4	0	3	127	16%	24%	20%	0%	14%	20%	336	271	20	3	21	651
1997	33	178	26	2	4	243	20%	43%	57%	33%	17%	37%	165	418	46	6	24	659
2001	26	38	14	4	10	92	16%	9%	27%	80%	42%	14%	166	412	52	5	24	659
2005	51	41	20	2	5	119	26%	12%	32%	33%	20%	18%	198	355	62	6	25	646
2010	147	63	10	1	6	227	48%	24%	18%	17%	26%	35%	306	258	57	6	23	650
2015	73	50	0	49	5	177	22%	22%	0%	88%	68%	27%	330	232	8	56	24	650
2017	30	46	4	1	6	87	9%	18%	33%	3%	25%	13%	317	262	12	35	24	650
2019	97	24	3	9	7	140	27%	14%	27%	19%	14%	22%	365	176	11	47	51	650

Notes: Excludes former MPs returning to the House of Commons after time away from Parliament. Liberal Democrat includes predecessor parties.

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

At which general election were current MPs first elected?

(includes by-elections since the previous general election)

	CON	LAB	LD	SNP	Other	Speaker	Total
1974 (Oct)	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
1979	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
1983	6	5	0	0	0	0	11
1987	4	2	0	0	0	0	6
1992	10	2	0	0	0	0	13
1997	13	22	1	0	1	1	39
2001	11	10	1	1	3	0	26
2005	34	16	1	2	1	0	54
2010	97	31	0	0	4	0	133
2015	63	52	0	35	5	0	156
2017	26	30	5	1	3	0	66
2019	99	29	5	8	7	0	143
Total	364	201	13	47	24	1	650

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

Notes: Table correct at time of publishing, includes by-elections in the 2019 Parliament.

At the start of the 2019 Parliament, Sir Peter Bottomley (Conservative) had the longest length of service (44.5 years excluding dissolution periods) and was

first elected in 1975. He is designated the Father of the House. Sir Peter is followed by Margaret Beckett (41.1 years) first elected in 1974, and Barry Sheerman (40.6 years) first elected in 1979. Margaret Beckett was first elected earlier than Peter Bottomley but had a break in service between 1979 and 1983. As a result, Harriet Harman is designated Mother of the house as she has been in continuous service since 1982.

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

The 20 longest-serving MPs

As at 2019 General Election

Name of MP:	Days in service ^a	Years in service ^a	First elected	Party in 2017 GE
Peter Bottomley	16,240	44.5	1975	CON
Margaret Beckett	15,001	41.1	1974	LAB
Barry Sheerman	14,833	40.6	1979	LAB
Harriet Harman	13,559	37.1	1982	LAB
Nicholas Brown	13,335	36.5	1983	LAB
Jeremy Corbyn	13,335	36.5	1983	LAB
Roger Gale	13,335	36.5	1983	CON
Edward Leigh	13,335	36.5	1983	CON
William Cash	13,006	35.6	1984	CON
George Howarth	12,082	33.1	1986	LAB
Diane Abbott	11,872	32.5	1987	LAB
John Redwood	11,872	32.5	1987	CON
David Davis	11,850	32.4	1987	CON
Greg Knight	11,837	32.4	1983	CON
Tony Lloyd	11,645	31.9	1983	LAB
Christopher Chope	11,487	31.4	1983	CON
David Evennett	10,409	28.5	1983	CON
Andrew Mitchell	10,374	28.4	1987	CON
John Spellar	10,332	28.3	1982	LAB
Paul Beresford	10,135	27.7	1992	LAB

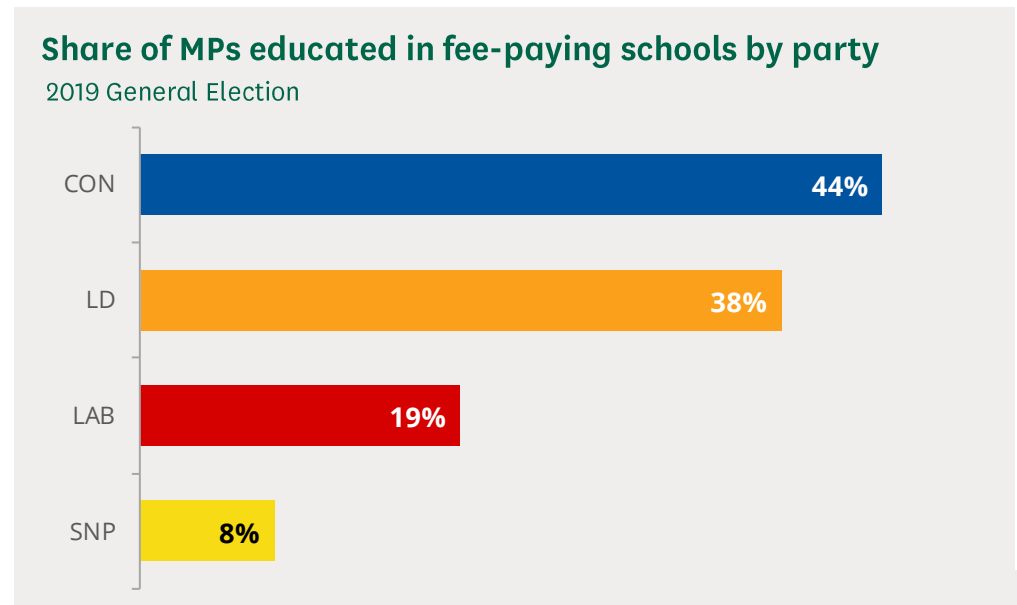
Notes: 'Years in service' does not include the Parliament dissolution periods and is estimated as at the dissolution of the 2017-19 Parliament. MPs who served the same number of days are ordered by surname.

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

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Education

Conservative MPs elected at the 2019 General Election were the most likely to have attended a fee-paying school: 44% compared to 38% Liberal Democrat, 19% Labour and 8% SNP.



Source: Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge The British General Election of 2019, pp 406-407

The British General Election of... series of books analyse the education of candidates and MPs at each election.¹¹

87% of MPs elected at the 2019 General Election were graduates and 22% attended Oxford or Cambridge.

29% of MPs attended fee-paying schools, the same as 2017.¹² The Conservatives were also more likely to be Oxford or Cambridge graduates (29%).

SNP MPs were least likely to have attended a private or selective school (84% attended a comprehensive school). None of the SNP MPs attended Oxford or Cambridge.

¹¹ Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge The British General Election of 2019 & previous editions.

¹² Rosie Campbell and Jennifer Hudson, 'Political Recruitment Under Pressure: MPs and Candidates', in P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), The British General Election of 2017, 2018 p407

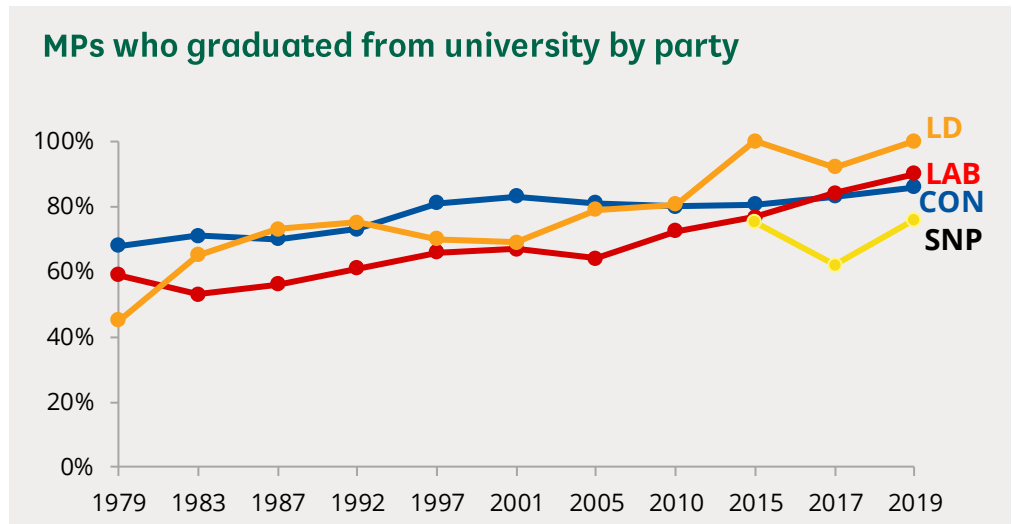
The figures below show how the educational background of MPs has changed between 1979 and 2019

Education of MPs elected in General Elections 1979 to 2019												
Four main parties, % attending educational institution												
		1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
CON	Fee-paying school	73%	70%	68%	62%	66%	64%	60%	54%	50%	44%	44%
	University	68%	71%	70%	73%	81%	83%	81%	80%	81%	83%	86%
	Oxford / Cambridge	49%	48%	44%	45%	51%	48%	43%	34%	30%	34%	29%
LAB	Fee-paying school	18%	14%	14%	15%	16%	17%	18%	14%	16%	13%	19%
	University	59%	53%	56%	61%	66%	67%	64%	72%	77%	84%	90%
	Oxford / Cambridge	21%	15%	15%	16%	15%	16%	16%	17%	21%	20%	21%
LD	Fee-paying school	55%	52%	45%	50%	41%	35%	39%	39%	13%	30%	38%
	University	45%	65%	73%	75%	70%	69%	79%	81%	100%	92%	100%
	Oxford / Cambridge	27%	30%	27%	30%	33%	27%	31%	28%	13%	17%	28%
SNP	Fee-paying school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7%	6%	8%
	University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	75%	62%	76%
	Oxford / Cambridge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0%	0%	0%

Source: Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge The British General Election of 2019 & previous editions p408. Data for the SNP is not available before 2015.

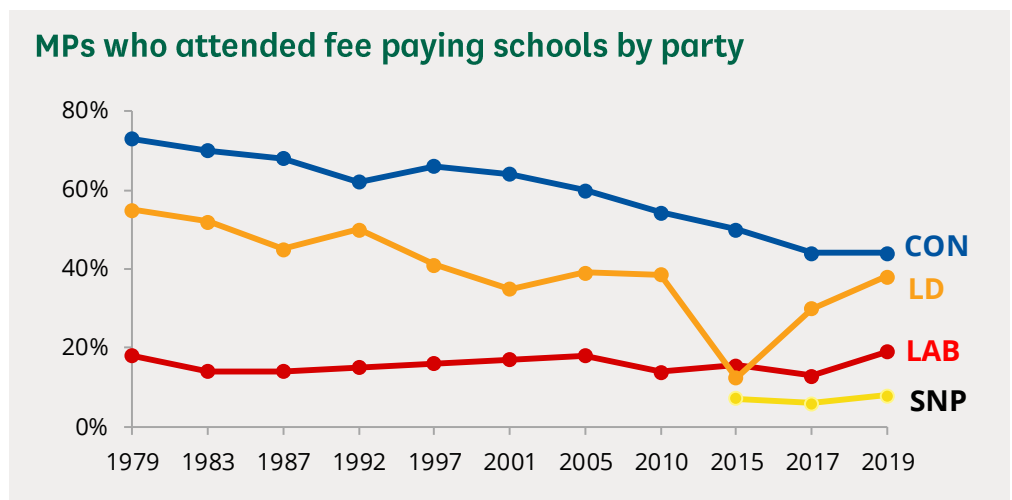
In 2019, all parties had a record proportion of university graduates, with the Liberal Democrats maintaining its position as the party with the highest proportion of university graduates, (100%), equalling the figure for 2015.

The SNP had the largest increase from 2017 (62%), with 14% more members attending university in 2019 (76%). The share of university-educated Labour MPs increased from 59% in 1979 to 90% in 2019, while the proportion of Conservative graduates rose from 68% to 86%. The Liberal Democrats had an increase from 45% in 1979 to 100% in 2019.



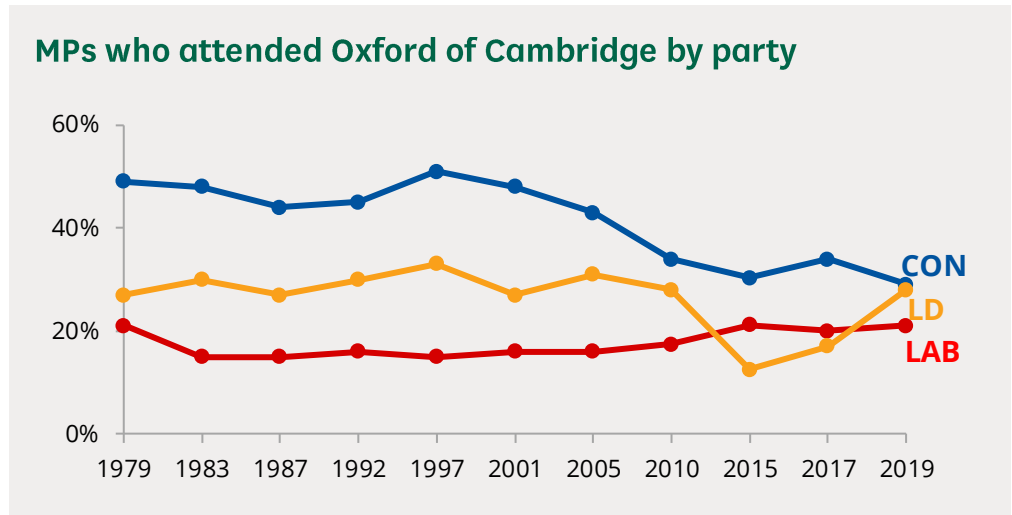
Source: Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge, The British General Election of 2019 and previous editions p408

The share of MPs who attended fee-paying schools has decreased since 1979. The proportion of Conservative MPs decreased the most, from 73% in 1979 to 44% in 2019. The Liberal Democrat share fell from 55% to 38% and Labour remained similar, 18% in 1979 compared to 19% in 2019. The SNP proportion also remained around 8% between 2015 and 2019.



Source: Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge, The British General Election of 2019 and previous editions p408

The proportion of Oxford and Cambridge graduates has decreased for all parties. In 1979, 225 Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs had been to Oxford or Cambridge, representing 36% of MPs. Around 22% of MPs elected at the 2019 election had an Oxbridge background. None were from the SNP.



Source: Ford, Bale, Jennings & Surridge, The British General Election of 2019 & previous editions, p408

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Occupation

No official data is available on the occupational background of MPs. The British General Election of... series has, however, analysed the occupations of candidates and MPs at each election in recent decades.¹³

The historical data is restricted to Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, but gives a reasonably consistent guide to the occupational background of MPs over the period from 1979 to 2010.¹⁴ The 2015 data also includes Scottish National Party MPs.

The table below summarises the main occupation groups of MPs elected up to 2015. The data for 2017 and 2019 was published in a different format and is not comparable with earlier years: this data is presented below.

¹³ P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh et al, The British General Election of 2015 and previous editions.

¹⁴ In the period from 1951 to 2010, on average 97% of all elected MPs represented Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties (including predecessors).

MPs' occupations 1979 to 2015

Number of MPs (Conservative/Labour/Liberal Democrat/Scottish National)

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

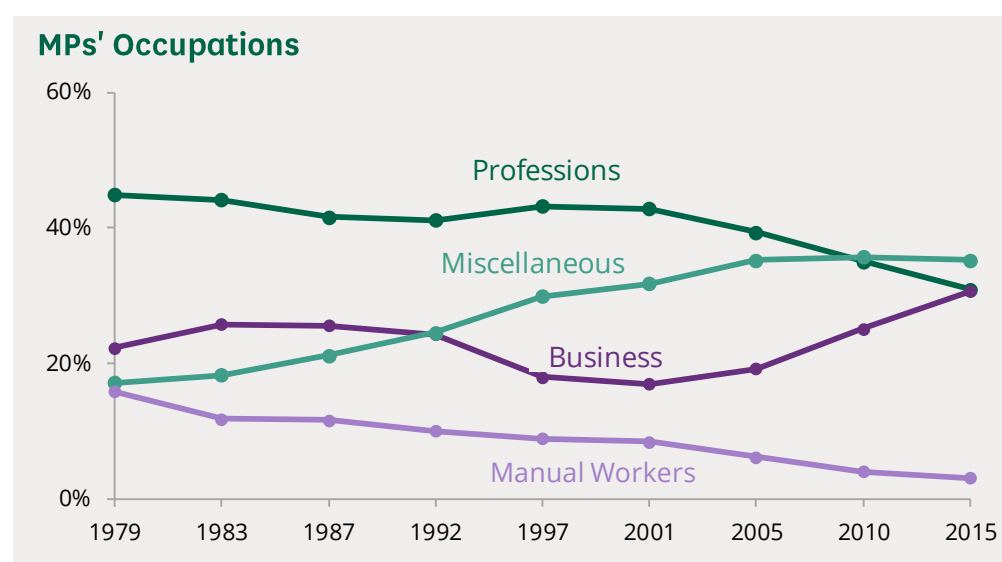
Notes: 1. Scottish National Party data is only included from 2015;
 2. The number of former miners is not recorded in the British General Election of 2015. The number for 2015 is based on the House of Commons Library calculations.
 3. From 2010, Nuffield study categories: 'White collar' includes: misc. white collar; union official; public relations; and charity/voluntary sector;
 Sources: P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), The British General Election of 2017 & earlier editions.

The number of MPs who were former manual workers decreased from around 16% of all MPs in 1979 to 3% in 2015. The proportion of MPs with a background in one of the ‘traditional’ professions has also fallen, from 45% in 1979 to 31% in 2015.¹⁵ Within this category the proportion of former schoolteachers and former barristers has declined, while the proportion of former solicitors has risen.

The numbers of teachers from schools and teachers from universities and colleges were rising until 1997. In the period from 2001 to 2015 they fell below the 1979 level.

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

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



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

¹⁵ The ‘traditional’ professions category is listed in Bryon Criddle, ‘Variable Diversity: MPs and Candidates’, in P. Cowley and D. Kavanagh (eds), *The British General Election of 2015, 2016*, p357

The table below shows newly elected MPs' occupations **immediately before** the 2017 and 2019 General Election. Campbell and Hudson, who compiled these figures, do not include their earlier or first employment.¹⁶

Newly elected MPs' occupations immediately before the 2017 and 2019 General Election

	2017				2019			
	CON	LAB	SNP	LD	CON	LAB	SNP	LD
Brokerage	17.4%	19.1%	20.0%	33.3%	9.0%	11.6%	8.3%	18.2%
Legal profession	12.0%	9.5%	2.9%	16.7%	7.9%	7.5%	4.2%	9.1%
Education	1.9%	7.6%	8.6%	16.7%	1.1%	4.0%	4.2%	9.1%
Physicians/dentists	2.2%	1.1%	5.7%	-	1.1%	-	2.1%	-
Architects/surveyors/engineers	1.3%	0.8%	2.9%	-	2.2%	-	-	-
Instrumental	31.9%	49.2%	37.1%	25.0%	55.1%	74.4%	64.6%	63.6%
Councillor/other elected office	8.8%	17.9%	14.3%	16.7%	43.0%	51.8%	52.1%	36.4%
Political/social/policy research	9.5%	10.3%	14.3%	-	9.3%	9.5%	62.5%	18.2%
Party official	4.4%	5.3%	5.7%	-	2.7%	0.5%	6.3%	-
Journalism/broadcast/media	3.2%	2.3%	2.9%	8.3%	2.7%	1.0%	-	-
Trade union official	-	11.5%	-	-	-	11.6%	-	-
Lobbyist	6.0%	1.9%	-	-	-	-	-	9.1%
Business/commerce	41.0%	5.7%	17.1%	33.3%	25.2%	5.0%	16.7%	18.2%
Other	9.1%	24.4%	22.9%	8.3%	10.7%	9.0%	10.4%	-
Agriculture/farmers	1.9%	-	-	-	0.3%	-	-	-
Armed forces	0.6%	0.8%	-	-	1.9%	1.5%	-	-
Civil service/local authority	1.6%	1.1%	2.9%	-	1.1%	1.0%	-	-
Clergy	-	0.4%	-	-	-	-	-	-
NHS	-	2.7%	-	-	0.8%	3.0%	2.1%	-
Other	-	1.5%	5.7%	8.3%	1.1%	2.0%	-	-
Other white collar	1.9%	3.1%	5.7%	-	0.3%	0.5%	-	-
Retired	0.6%	-	2.9%	-	-	1.0%	-	-
Social worker	-	1.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Voluntary sector	1.6%	12.2%	5.7%	-	1.4%	2.0%	4.2%	-
Writer/literary/artist	0.3%	0.8%	-	-	0.3%	1.0%	2.1%	-
Manual	0.6%	1.5%	2.9%	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Rosie Campbell and Jennifer Hudson, 'Political Recruitment Under Pressure: MPs and Candidates', in (eds), The British General Election of 2017 & 2019. p412

All parties showed a significant increase in the proportion of 'instrumental' (ie, political¹⁷) roles held by MPs. Labour had the highest proportion (74.4%),

¹⁶ The authors acknowledge that an MP's first employment can also be used as an alternative indicator of occupational class.

¹⁷ The authors describe "instrumental" occupations as narrowly political roles. The jobs envisaged are set out in

up 25.2% from 2017. The SNP (64.6%), the Liberal Democrats (63.6%) and the Conservatives (55.2%) all still had over half of MPs from an 'instrumental background' in 2019.

The Conservatives remained the party with the highest proportion of MPs holding a business role before their election (25.2%), however this figure declined from 41.0% in 2017. This is compared to the SNP (16.7%) and Labour (5.0%) which had similar figures to 2017 (17.1% and 5.7% respectively) and the Liberal Democrats who had a reduction of 15.1% in MPs from business backgrounds in 2019.

Around a fifth of Liberal Democrat MPs (18.3%) and a tenth of Labour (11.6%), Conservative (9.0%) and SNP (8.3%) MPs previously held roles in 'brokerage', all these percentages represent a decrease from 2017.

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