

# Party Representation in Public Participation Broadcasting

**BBC Question Time (1979-2019)**

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# Outline

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1. **Background**
2. **Party representation**
3. **Responsiveness to electoral outcomes**
4. **Next steps**

# Background

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- BBC's flagship political debate programme (1979-)
- Weekly panel of politicians, journalists & commentators
- Political elites questioned directly by the public

## Format applied in other countries:

- Questions & Answers (RTE), Q+A (ABC)

## Accusations of bias in its:

- Audience, Location, and **Panel selection**

**EXPRESS** 

### BBC bias: Question Time's most frequent panellists are ALL Remainers

THE BBC was slammed for inflicting "Remainergeddon" on its viewers after it was revealed the broadcaster's most frequent Question Time panellists overwhelmingly voted for Remain, as the broadcasters faces new accusations of a pro-Brexit bias.

By **CHARLES HARRISON**  
11:36, Sun, Aug 28, 2022 | UPDATED: 11:56, Sun, Aug 28, 2022



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# Background

## Labour MP Rupa Huq:

“One barometer people have of impartiality is the panels that you see on Question Time”.

## BBC Director of Editorial Policy:

“...trying to make sure that its panels are gender representative, are ethnically diverse, are geographically disparate, are socioeconomically representative, are **politically representative of all of the different political parties in the country...**”

## BBC bosses quizzed on 'massively unbalanced' Question Time panels

21st March



Screenshot of a Question Time panel chaired by Fiona Bruce (Image: BBC)

# BBC as a Public Broadcaster

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- Strictest guidelines for party representation
- Due impartiality (BBC Royal Charter)
- 'Impartiality as balance' (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2017)

## How do you decide which parties are represented on Question Time?

- "...there will nearly always be a representative from the UK government and the official opposition on the panel"
- "...representatives from other political parties across the series, taking as our guide the **level of electoral support at national level which each party enjoys**"

# Research Questions

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1. **How are smaller parties represented on BBC Question Time panels?**
2. **Does party representation reflect electoral outcomes at UK general elections?**

Time period: 1979–2019

# Previous Work on BBCQT

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- **Single episode case studies**  
(Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Cranfield, 2012)
- **Interviews with broadcasters**  
(Mair et al., 2003)
- **Online engagement, second screen social networks**  
(Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2011; Doughty et. al., 2012)

# Data

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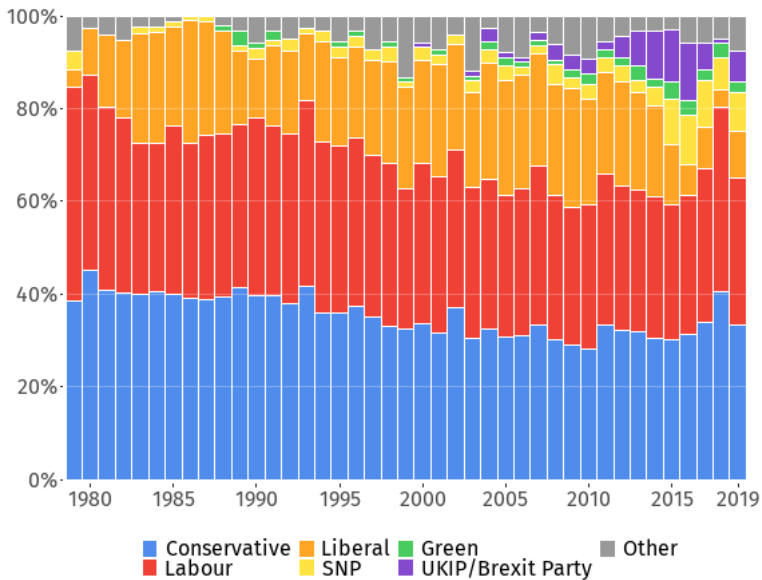
## BBCQT Appearances

- Collected panellist information for all appearances between 1979-2019 (6300 apps, 1400 eps)
- Combination of web-scraping and hand coding
- **Variables:** Party affiliation, gender, ethnicity, educational background, occupation



# **Party Representation**

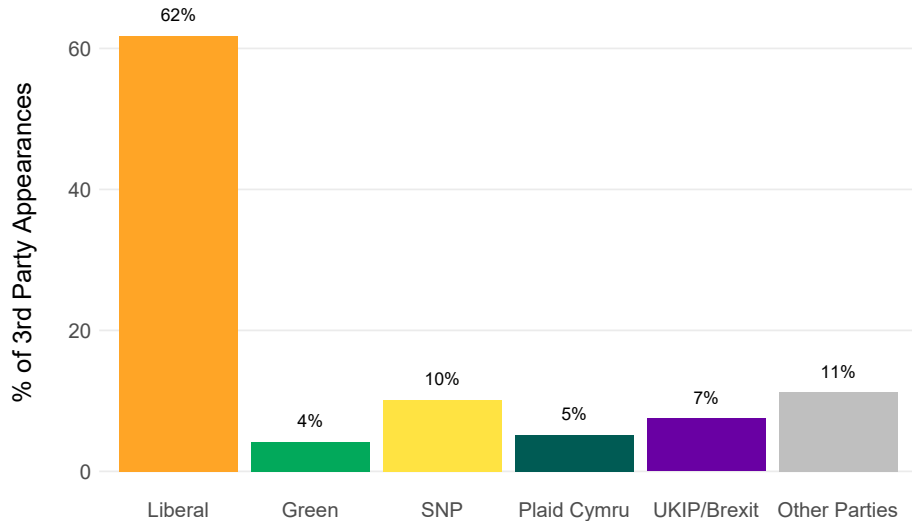
BBCQT Politician Appearances by Party

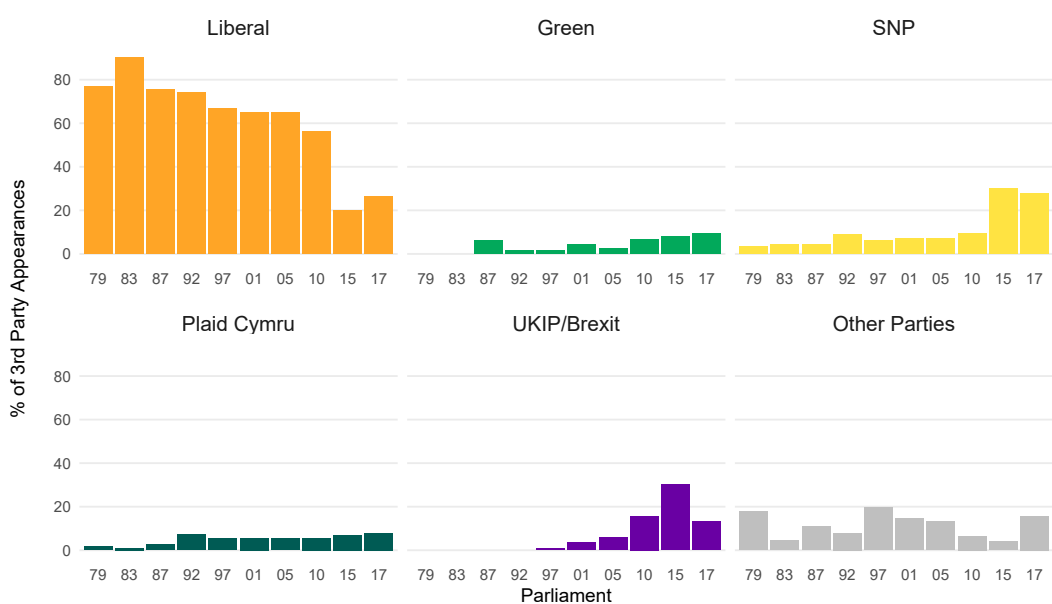


### Percentage of Party Appearances by Occupation

Party Name	MP	Peer	MEP	Devolved	Local	Party
Conservative	86	7	0	3	1	3
Labour	84	6	1	3	2	4
Liberal	72	17	0	2	1	8
SNP	52	0	1	40	0	7
Plaid Cymru	50	2	0	45	0	3
Other Parties	39	20	1	26	5	8
Green	32	6	23	4	2	34
UKIP	7	0	65	4	3	20

## Percentage of Small Party Appearances



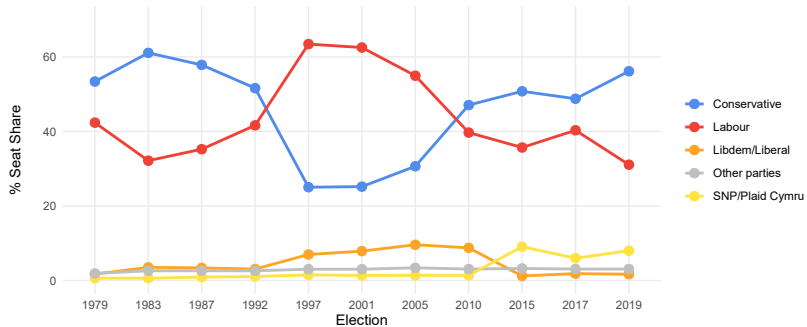
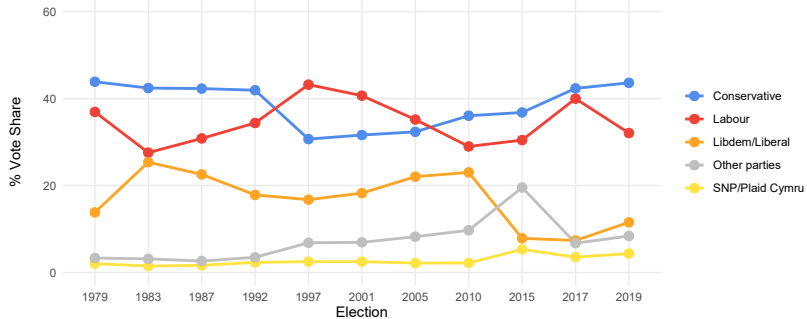


## Top 10 Most Frequent Guests from Small Parties

Name	Party	Appearances
Menzies Campbell	Lib Dem	46
Charles Kennedy	Lib Dem	42
Shirley Williams	Lib Dem	37
Paddy Ashdown	Lib Dem	34
Simon Hughes	Lib Dem	33
Nigel Farage	UKIP	32
Alex Salmond	SNP	29
Vince Cable	Lib Dem	28
Caroline Lucas	Green	25
Nicola Sturgeon	SNP	19

### Proportion of First-time appearances by Party

Party	Appearances	Guests	Ratio
Other Parties	142	59	0.42
SNP	128	31	0.24
Plaid Cymru	66	15	0.23
UKIP	95	22	0.23
Green	53	10	0.19
Conservative	1402	248	0.18
Labour	1361	241	0.18
Liberal	783	106	0.14





# Next Steps

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## Data

- Devolved and European elections
- Public opinion polling

## Theory

- Representation, responsiveness
- Due impartiality

# References

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