

who governs Britain –

a profile of MPs in the
2015 parliament

By Paul Hunter and Dan Holden



Introduction

What is the background of the MPs in the new Parliament? What is their education and occupational profile, gender and age? And, how have these trends changed since 2010? This analysis of MPs in the 2015 Parliament addresses these questions and shows how far our elected politicians reflect wider society.

The analysis of MPs is intended to shed light on the extent to which the new Parliament measures up. It provides a snapshot of the social backgrounds of those who govern Britain. It also looks back to examine if progress has been made, and where and which parties require further improvements.

The data was collected immediately after the election and therefore the report is not intended to be a definitive study. Instead its aim is to offer an instant picture of the new parliament which will hopefully inform and stimulate debate.

To offer insights into the change that has been made this brief breakdown looks back at previous parliament. The 2010 data is taken from a study we undertook five years ago and the other historical data is taken from the House of Commons Library and 'The British General Election of 2005' by Butler & Kavanagh.

The time constraints do however mean we miss certain measures of equality not least ethnicity, disability, class, sexual orientation and religion. However, we hope in time to conduct further research to give a more rounded picture of the new MPs.

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Summary

The following is a brief summary and comparison of the data on the backgrounds of MPs in the new parliament:

- The 'average' MP is male, aged 51 and went to state school then to university (but not Oxbridge). He is most likely to have previously worked in politics.
- Remarkably 33% of MPs went to fee paying private schools (compared with a national average of around 7%). Around 52% of Conservative MPs; 17% Lib Dems; and 12% Labour MPs went to fee paying schools. These results were similar to 2010.
- The gender balance continues to improve – however parliament has still a long way to go. In 1987 women made up just 6% of all MPs, in the last parliament it improved to 22% and today it has increased to 29%. There is still a split by party with Labour far ahead with 41% of MPs being women, followed by SNP (36%) and then the Conservatives with just one in five. The Lib Dems now have no women in parliament.
- A quarter of all MPs have an occupational background in politics (the largest of any occupational group) highlighting the professionalisation of politics. The occupational background of MPs continues to be ever more biased toward business and the 'metropolitan professions', particularly finance, law, public affairs, and politics. However, there are major disparities between
- the parties. For example, 4% of Labour MPs have at some point worked in finance as compared with 25% for Conservatives. An alternative trend emerges with the public and voluntary sector, which is dominated by Labour MPs. As to be expected most of the blue collar and trade union occupations are with Labour MPs
- 2015 election saw new MPs form 25% of those elected. This election therefore did not witness the same influx of new MPs as in 2010 when 35% were not MPs in the previous parliament (although higher than 18% figure in 2005). The SNP unsurprisingly had the biggest intake of new MPs (90%), then Labour (21%), then Tories (19%). The Lib Dems had none.
- The average age of MPs is 51 years. This is line with average since 1992 of around the 50 year mark. There are slight differences between the main parties with the SNP the youngest (44) and Labour the oldest (53). Overall Labour, Lib Dems and Tories saw the average age of MPs rise slightly. 63% of MPs are aged between 40 and 59 years and just 15% below.
- The overwhelming majority of MPs are university educated and nearly a quarter (23%) went to Oxford or Cambridge (similar to 2005 and 2010). Around 45% of Conservative MPs were from Oxbridge ; 14% for Labour; and 13% for the Lib Dems. Perhaps unsurprisingly, no-one from the SNP went to Oxbridge.

New and re-elected MPs 2015 (and 2010)

		Labour	Conservative	Lib Dems	SNP	Total
2015	Re-elected	79%	81%	100%	10%	75%
	Newly elected	21%	19%	0%	90%	25%
2010	Re-elected	74%	54%	81%		65%
	Newly elected	26%	46%	19%		35%

Base: 650

Age of all MPs

	Average age at election	Under 40	40-59	60 and over
1992	50			
1997	48.8			
2005	50.6			
2010	49.8	20%	61%	19%
2015	51.2	15%	63%	21%

Base: 530

Age of MPs by Party 2015 (2010 figures in brackets)

	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	SNP
Average age	53.2 (51.8)	50.2 (47.8)	51.3 (51.8)	43.8 (44.7)

Base: 530

Women MPs

	Female % of total MPs
1987	6%
1992	9%
1997	18%
2005	20%
2010	22%
2015	29%

Base: 650

Percentage of women MPs in the main three parties

	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dems	SNP
1987	9%	5%	5%	
1992	14%	6%	10%	
1997	24%	8%	7%	
2005	28%	9%	16%	
2010	31%	16%	14%	17%
2015	41%	20%	0%	36%

Base: 650

Education of MPs elected in 2015 (2010 figures in brackets)

	All MPs	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	SNP
State school	67% (66%)	88% (88%)	48% (46%)	83% (59%)	96% (100%)
Private school	33% (34%)	12% (12%)	52% (54%)	17% (41%)	4% (0%)
Oxbridge	23% (24%)	14% (17%)	45% (32%)	13% (26%)	0% (0%)

Base: 504

Occupational background of MPs (brackets 2010 figures)

	All MPs	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	SNP
Business (SMEs, corporate, consultants)	22% (19%)	14% (7%)	29% (29%)	25% (31%)	29% (17%)
Finance (banking, accountancy)	15% (15%)	4% (3%)	25% (27%)	0% (12%)	9%
Law	14% (14%)	12% (11%)	17% (18%)	25% (8%)	9% (17%)
Media	10% (10%)	10% (12%)	9% (8%)	13% (12%)	16% (33%)
Teachers	5% (6%)	7% (8%)	3% (4%)	13% (10%)	4%
Lecturer	4% (6%)	6% (10%)	2% (8%)	13 (10%)	5% (17%)
Public affairs (PR, marketing)	8% (11%)	6% (6%)	12% (15%)	25% (15%)	0%
Health	4% (2.5%)	4% (2%)	4% (3%)	0% (2%)	4%
Manual	3% (4%)	7% (9%)	1% (1%)	0% (0%)	0%
Politics	25% (24%)	29% (27%)	19% (20%)	25% (21%)	35%
Agriculture	1% (2%)	0% (0%)	2% (3%)	0% (2%)	0%
Voluntary	8% (9%)	15% (15%)	3% (3%)	0% (8%)	13% (17%)
Armed services	4% (4%)	0% (1%)	7% (8%)	0% (0%)	0%
Unions	6% (7%)	15% (18%)	0% (0%)	0% (0%)	2%

Base: 627 (There is an element of double counting as some MPs have had more than one type of job)

