

Who Governs Britain?

A Profile of MPs in the
New Parliament

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Introduction

As we enter a period of political change we thought it would be useful to profile the recently elected MPs. We particularly wanted to study the educational background and previous occupations of all MPs, not least so we could gauge what policy areas and issues members might be interested in and to see how this may have changed since previous elections. In addition, we felt it would be interesting to interrogate the biographical details and data in order to get some sense of what makes up your archetype Labour, Conservative, and Lib Dem MP. What are the ages, gender, schooling, previous employment etc of MPs, and how do they differ between the main parties?

By collating and comparing the information with previous elections we have tried to provide at least a snapshot of the social backgrounds of 'who governs Britain' today. Whilst we would not lay claim to this being a definitive study, we hope the information will inform the public and stimulate debate.

The profiles are based on the research we have undertaken immediately after the election and are therefore provisional and subject to minor amendments. However, the analysis is near enough complete and the percentage breakdowns are an accurate guide to the make up of the new Parliament. Most of the historical data is taken from the House of Commons Library and 'The British General Election of 2005' by Butler & Kavanagh.

The survey covers 649 MPs (the remaining Thirsk and Malton seat will not be contested until May 27) and is primarily focused on the three main parties: Conservative (306 MPs); Labour (258 MPs); Lib Dems (57); and others (28 MPs).

The Smith Institute intends to follow up this report with more in depth analysis of the policy and party interest of MPs. We hope by undertaking such work to cast more light on the people who represent us in today's Parliament.

Summary

"Parliament today better reflects the gender balance and is more ethnically diverse, but in terms of educational and vocational background the new political elite look remarkably like the old establishment. It is surprising how many of our MPs were privately educated, went to Oxbridge and worked in the professions, particularly Conservatives and Lib Dems. It seems that our Parliament is becoming less representative in terms of education and occupation, and continues to attract similar types of people from a rather narrow professional base".

The following is a brief summary and commentary on the data, which we have compiled in the tables below (a detailed breakdown is available on request).

- The 2010 election witnessed a large influx of **new MPs**, including Conservatives, Labour, and Lib Dems – as well as from the smaller parties. In 2005 18% of MPs had not served in the previous Parliament. In 2010 the equivalent figure was nearly double at 35%.
- Although the average **age** of MPs has stayed roughly the same since 1992 (50 years), there are slight difference between the main parties with Labour MPs being slightly older on average. 61% of MPs are aged between 40 and 59 years.
- The **gender balance** of MPs has improved dramatically since the 1980s. In 1987 women made up 6% of all MPs, today it is 22% (one in five). It is noteworthy that up until the 2010 election most of the increase was accounted for by Labour MPs. However, the big shift in 2010 is in the number of Conservative women MPs which has risen from 9% in 2005 to 16%. The number of Lib Dem women MPs has fallen back to 14%.
- The number of **ethnic minority** MPs has risen from 15 in 2005 to 27, the largest ever increase. 4.1% of MPs are now from non-white backgrounds, compared with 2.3% in 2005 (around 8% of the total population are from non-white backgrounds). The number of ethnic minority Conservative MPs has risen from 2 to 11; and for Labour from 13 to 15. The Lib Dems are the only main party with no minority MPs.

- A remarkable 34% of MPs went to fee paying **private schools** (compared with a national average of around 7%). Around 54% of Conservative MPs; 41% Lib Dems; and 12% Labour MPs went to fee paying schools. 20 MPs (19 Conservative and 1 Lib Dem) went to Eton (6% of all Conservative MPs).
- 20 MPs (19 Conservative and 1 Lib Dem) went to **Eton**, compared with 14 in 2001.
- The overwhelming majority of MPs are **university educated** and nearly a quarter (24%) went to Oxford or Cambridge (similar to 2005). Around 32% of Conservative MPs were from **Oxbridge**; 17% for Labour; and 26% for the Lib Dems.
- 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, 3% of Labour MPs have at some point worked in finance as compared with 27% for Conservatives. A similar picture emerges in regard to business where nearly a third of all Conservatives and Lib Dem MPs have worked in business occupations. An alternative trend emerges with the public and voluntary sector, which is dominated by Labour MPs. Politics, law and public affairs are more evenly spread among the MPs. As to be expected most of the blue collar and trade union occupations are with Labour MPs.

Main Findings

Election 2010 – New and re-elected MPs

	Lab	Con	Lib Dems	Others	Total
Re-elected	190	166	46	20	65%
Newly elected MPs	68	140	11	8	35%

In 2005 newly elected MPs made up 18% of the total

Age of all MPs

	Average age at election (years)	Under 40	40-59	Over 60
1992	50			
1997	48.8			
2005	50.6			
2010	49.8	20%	61%	19%

Age of MPs by Party 2010

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem
Average age (years)	51.8	47.8	51.8

Women MPs

	Female % of Total MPs
1987	6%
1992	9%
1997	18%
2005	20%
2010	22%

Percentage of women MPs in the main three parties

	Lab	Con	Lib Dems
1987	9%	5%	5%
1992	14%	6%	10%
1997	24%	8%	7%
2005	28%	9%	16%
2010	31%	16%	14%

Ethnicity of MPs

	1992	1997	2005	2010
Number of non-white MPs	6	12	15	27

NB: Non-white Labour MPs has risen from 13 to 15; Conservatives from two to 11.

Education of MPs elected in 2010

	All MPs	Lab	Con	Lib Dem
State School ¹	66%	88%	46%	59%
Private School (fee paying) ²	34%	12%	54%	41%
Oxbridge	24%	17%	32%	26%

(1) based on data from 553 MPs

(2) based on data from 544 MPs

NB: 20 MPs (19 Conservative and 1 Lib Dem) went to Eton

Occupation background of MPs 2010

	All MPs	Lab	Con	Lib Dem
Business (SMEs, corporate, consultants)	19%	6.8%	29%	31%
Finance (banking, accountancy)	15%	3.2%	27%	11.5%
Law	14%	10.7%	18%	7.6%
Media	10%	11.5%	7.9%	11.5%
Teachers	6%	7.6%	3.8%	9.6%
Lecturer	6%	10%	2.4%	9.6%

Public affairs (PR, marketing)	11%	6%	15%	15%
Health	2.5%	1.6%	3%	2%
Manual	4%	9%	0.7%	0%
Politics	24%	27%	20%	21%
Agriculture	1.6%	0%	3.1%	1.9%
Voluntary	9%	15%	3.1%	7.6%
Armed services	4%	0.8%	8%	0%
Unions	7%	18%	0%	0%

NB: Based on data from 616 MPs. There is an element of double counting as some MPs have had more than one vocation.