



Social background of MPs

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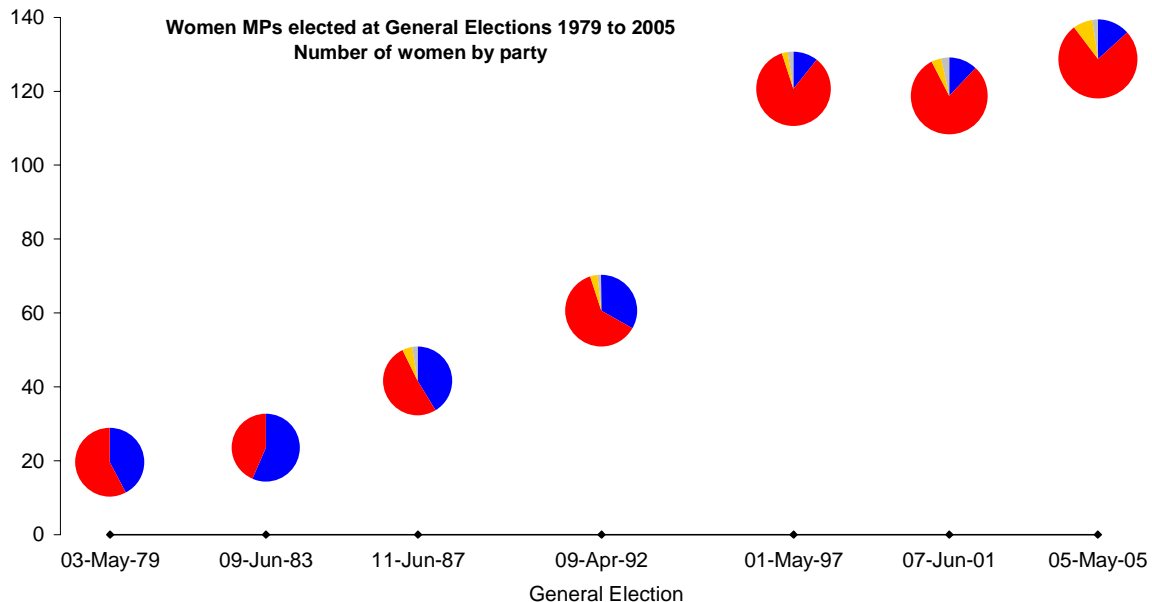
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Social & General Statistics Section

This note provides a comparison of the age, sex, ethnicity and occupational and educational background of Members of Parliament before and after the 2005 General Election. Data are drawn from the House of Commons Library's database of MPs, unless otherwise stated. This is available on the Parliamentary intranet.¹

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¹ <http://hcl1.hclibrary.parliament.uk/sections/hcio/members/mpssince79.asp>

A. Age

The average age of MPs went down after the 1997 election, largely as result of the election of 10 MPs aged under 30 and a reduction in the number of MPs aged 60+. Since 1997, the average age of MPs elected has risen, from 49 years in 1997 to 51 years in 2005. In 2005 56% (363) of those elected were aged over 50, compared with 47% (309) in 1992, and 46% (303) in 1997. The 14 MPs aged over 70 elected in 2005 was higher than at any previous election since 1979, when it had also been 14.

The following table shows the ages of Members at the start of the current and previous Parliaments.

Table 1

Ages of Members of Parliament elected at General Elections

Election year	Average Age at election date	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Total
1992	50.0	1	82	259	211	95	3	651
1997	48.8	10	92	254	227	68	8	659
2001	49.8	4	79	236	247	83	10	659
2005	50.6	3	89	191	249	100	14	646

Of those elected at the 2005 General Election, Labour MPs are older, on average than those from the other major parties. 90% of Labour MPs are aged over 40; compared to 83% of Conservative and 69% of Liberal Democrats.

Table 2

Age of MPs elected at 2005 General Election by party

	Number	Average age (years)	Under 40	41-59	60+
Lab	355	52.2	10%	71%	19%
Con	198	49.3	17%	65%	18%
LD	62	46.0	31%	60%	10%
Other	31	50.8	13%	77%	10%
<i>All</i>	<i>646</i>	<i>50.6</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>18%</i>

B. Gender

In 1987 there were 41 women MPs, 6% of all MPs. The number of women MPs rose over the next two parliaments to 120 in 1997 (122 following the election of two women at by-elections). That number fell to 118 after the 2001 election but rose to 127 after the 2005

General Election. This means that, women now make up 20%, 1 in 5, of all MPs. This is the highest ever proportion.

Table 2 shows the figures for the start of each of the last five Parliaments:

Table 2

Male and Female MPs 1979 to 2005

Election	Male	Female	Total	Female % of all
1979	616	19	635	3%
1983	627	23	650	4%
1987	609	41	650	6%
1992	591	60	651	9%
1997	609	120	659	18%
2001	541	118	659	18%
2005	609	127	646	20%

As Table 3 shows, the majority of Female MPs are Labour MPs and this has especially been the case since 1997.

Table 3

Women MPs by Party

	Number				Percentage of party total			
	Lab	Con	LibDem	Other	Lab	Con	LibDem	Other
1987	21	17	1	2	9%	5%	5%	9%
1992	37	20	2	1	14%	6%	10%	4%
1997	101	13	3	3	24%	8%	7%	10%
2001	94	14	5	5	23%	8%	10%	17%
2005	98	17	10	3	28%	9%	16%	10%

C. Occupation

The Nuffield election studies provide analyses of occupations of candidates and MPs elected at each election. These data are restricted to the three main parties but give a reasonably consistent guide to the occupational background of MPs over the period. The following table summarises the proportions in the main groups:

Table 4

MPs' Occupations 1987 to 2005

% of all from main parties (Conservative/Labour/Liberal Democrat)

	Number					Percent				
	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
Professions	262	258	272	270	242	41.7%	41.1%	43.2%	42.9%	39.3%
Barrister	57	53	36	33	34	9.1%	8.5%	5.7%	5.2%	5.5%
Solicitor	31	30	28	35	38	4.9%	4.8%	4.5%	5.6%	6.2%
Doctor	5	6	9	8	6	0.8%	1.0%	1.4%	1.3%	1.0%
Civil service/local govt	22	26	37	35	28	3.5%	4.1%	5.9%	5.6%	4.6%
Teachers: University/college	36	45	61	53	44	5.7%	7.2%	9.7%	8.4%	7.2%
Teacher: school	48	57	65	64	47	7.6%	9.1%	10.3%	10.2%	7.6%
Business	161	152	113	107	118	25.6%	24.2%	18.0%	17.0%	19.2%
Miscellaneous	133	154	188	200	217	21.1%	24.6%	29.9%	31.7%	35.3%
White Collar	27	46	72	76	78	4.3%	7.3%	11.4%	12.1%	12.7%
Politician/Pol organiser	34	46	60	66	87	5.4%	7.3%	9.5%	10.5%	14.1%
Publisher/Journalist	42	44	47	50	43	6.7%	7.0%	7.5%	7.9%	7.0%
Manual Workers	73	63	56	53	38	11.6%	10.0%	8.9%	8.4%	6.2%
Miner	17	13	13	12	11	2.7%	2.1%	2.1%	1.9%	1.8%
Total	629	627	629	630	615	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Butler et al / The British General Election of 2005 and earlier editions

The proportion with professional backgrounds has remained fairly constant at around 40%. However, within this category the proportion of former barristers has fallen while the proportion of former solicitors and teachers from universities/colleges has risen. 2005 also saw a rise in the proportion of MPs with a business background (largely as result of an increase in the number in this category from the Conservative side); and growth in the "Miscellaneous" group (largely due to an increase in the number of in the "politician/political organiser" category).

A breakdown of MPs' occupations by party for those elected in 2005 is given in Table 5.

Table 5

Occupation of MPs elected at the 2005 General Election

	Number			Percentage		
	Lab	Con	LibDem	Lab	Con	LibDem
Professions	141	76	25	40%	38%	40%
Barrister	10	22	2	3%	11%	3%
Solicitor	18	18	2	5%	9%	3%
Doctor	1	3	2	0%	2%	3%
Civil service/local govt	22	3	3	6%	2%	5%
Teachers: University/college	41	0	3	12%	0%	5%
Teacher: school	32	6	9	9%	3%	15%
Business	25	75	18	7%	38%	29%
Miscellaneous	154	45	18	43%	23%	29%
White Collar	70	4	4	20%	2%	6%
Politician/Political organiser	60	20	7	17%	10%	11%
Publisher/Journalist	24	14	5	7%	7%	8%
Manual Workers	35	2	1	10%	1%	2%
Miner	10	1	0	3%	1%	0%
Total	355	198	62	100%	100%	100%

Source: Butler et al *The British General Election of 2005*

D. Ethnicity

There were 15 MPs elected at the 2005 General Election from an ethnic minority. This was an increase of three from the 2001 election. The following table shows their breakdown by party:

Table 6

Ethnicity of MPs elected at General Elections 1992 to 2005

	White				Non-White				Total			
	1992	1997	2001	2005	1992	1997	2001	2005	1992	1997	2001	2005
Labour	266	409	400	342	5	9	12	13	271	418	412	355
Conservative	335	165	166	196	1	0	0	2	336	165	166	198
Liberal Democrat	20	46	52	62	0	0	0	0	20	46	52	62
Other	24	30	29	31	0	0	0	0	24	30	29	31
Total	645	650	647	631	6	9	12	15	651	659	659	646

Sources: *Dod on Disk, Butler and Kavanagh: The British General Election of 1997*
Operation Black Vote
House of Commons Library Research Paper 05/33

The first non-white MPs since the War were elected in 1987, when four Labour MPs were from an ethnic minority background. Following the 2005 election, 2.3% of Members of Parliament are from non-white backgrounds. This compares with the 8% of the UK population who were from a non-white background at the time of the 2001 Census of Population.

E. Education

Around one-third of MPs had been to fee-paying schools. This proportion varies by party – from 18% of Labour MPs to 60% of Conservative and 39% of Liberal Democrat. By comparison, 8% of pupils aged 11 and over in UK schools are in non-maintained (fee-paying) schools.² Around three-quarters of MPs elected in 2005 were graduates. One-quarter were from Oxford or Cambridge universities.

Table 7

Education of MPs elected in 2005 (3 main parties)

	Lab	Con	LD
Fee-paying school	63 18%	118 60%	24 39%
University	226 64%	160 81%	49 79%
of which: Oxford & Cambridge	58 16%	86 43%	19 31%

Source: Butler & Kavanagh *the British General Election of 2005* Table 10.5

² 2003-4 figure; DFES *Education and Training Statistics for the UK 2004*

F. Parliamentary Experience

Of those elected in 2005, 119 (18%) had no previous parliamentary experience; 4 had served in parliaments prior to 2001 and 523 (81%) had been MPs in the previous 2001-05 parliament.