



BRIEFING PAPER

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Membership of UK political parties

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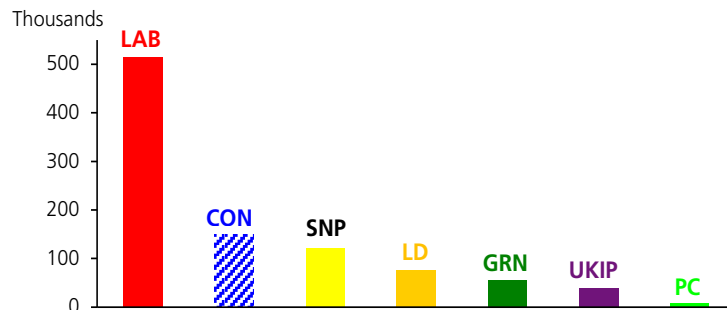
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Summary

According to the latest available estimates from political parties' head offices, press releases and media estimates:

- The **Labour Party** has around 515,000 members, as of July 2016.
- The **Conservative Party** had 149,800 members as of December 2013, the latest available estimate published by CCHQ.
- The **Scottish National Party** has around 120,000 members, as of July 2016.
- The **Liberal Democrat Party** has 76,000 members, as of July 2016.
- The **Green Party** (England and Wales) has 55,500 members, as of July 2016.
- **UKIP** has around 39,000 members, as of July 2016.
- The **Plaid Cymru** has 8,273 members, as of July 2016.

Membership of UK political parties, July 2016



Source: latest available figures provided by party head offices

Note: Conservative figures are as of 1 December 2013 (Latest available estimate)

Membership of the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats has increased to around 1.6% of the electorate in 2016, compared to a historic low of 0.8% in 2013. Across the UK, Labour Party membership increased from 0.6% in 2013 to 1.1% in 2016.

Membership of "other" parties has changed markedly in recent years. In July 2016 SNP membership was around 120,000, compared to 25,000 in December 2013; across Scotland, assuming all Scottish National Party members are in Scotland, SNP membership increased from 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 to 2.9% in 2016. In July 2016 Green Party (England and Wales) membership was around 55,000, compared to 13,800 in December 2013. UKIP's membership increased from 32,000 in December 2013 to around 47,000 in May 2015, though has since fallen to 39,000 in July 2016.

In 2015 income from membership fees comprise 46% of the SNP's income, 35% of the Green Party's (England and Wales), 21% of Plaid Cymru's, 19% of Labour's, 18% of UKIP's, 11% of the Liberal Democrat's and 2% of the Conservative's.

Identification with political parties fell to a historic low in 2012, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey, but has since risen to its highest level since 1987. Academic surveys suggest people of professional/managerial occupations are disproportionately represented among the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green Parties, while UKIP party members were more likely than their counterparts to have left school at 16.

This note uses a range of sources to examine party membership and support in the UK, specifically membership levels, the income membership fees generate and the social characteristics of party members. For context, it also provides data on membership to non-party political organisations including trade unions, charities and campaigns.

1. Introduction

In summer 2016 approximately 1.6% of the electorate was a member of either the Conservative, Labour or the Liberal Democrat parties. This is a rise compared to 2013, when membership of these three parties reached a historic low of around 0.8%. In contrast, 3.8% of the electorate in 1983 were a member of the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties.

Change in UK Political Party membership has not been uniform either between parties or over time. Labour experienced a rise in membership ahead of the 1997 General Election before subsequently falling again. More recently the SNP, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green Party have all recorded rises.

As of July 2016, Labour has 515,000 members, the SNP 120,000, the Liberal Democrats 76,000, the Green Party (England and Wales) 55,500, UKIP 39,000 and Plaid Cymru 8,300.

The Conservative Party does not routinely publish membership figures. As of December 2013 the party had, according to CCHQ, an estimated 149,800 members.¹ As of July 2016 the party has between 130,000 and 150,000 members, according to academic estimates.²

Political parties are under no legal obligation to publish membership statistics. There is no uniformly recognised definition of membership, nor is there an established method or body to monitor it. Three source types – figures voluntarily included in financial submissions to the Electoral Commission, party press releases and media estimates – form the basis of this briefing. Throughout, figures submitted to the Electoral Commission are used in charts and tables and are considered to be the most authoritative source.

In 2015 income from membership fees comprised 46% of the SNP's income, 35% of the Green Party's (England and Wales), 21% of Plaid Cymru's, 19% of Labour's, 18% of UKIP's, 11% of the Liberal Democrat's and 2% of the Conservative's.

Identification with political parties fell to a historic low in 2012, but has since risen to its highest level since 1987. The 33rd British Attitudes Survey found that in 2015 around 41% of people identified very or fairly strongly with a political party. At the same time support for parties other than the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats is at a historic high. At 2015 General Election 24.9% voted for "other" parties and in 2016 Local Elections, 21%.³

Trade Union membership (6.5 million in 2015, Labour Force Survey) remains many times higher than party memberships. Multiple non-party political campaigns and organisations, like Countryside Alliance and CND, claim memberships rivalling those of political parties.

¹ Wallace, Mark (Conservative Home); [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 --- up 11.7 per cent](#) (28 September 2014)

² The Financial Times (2016) [Who, and where, are the Conservative party's members?](#)

³ At Local Elections 2016, UKIP got 12% of votes that went to other parties (House of Commons Library Briefing paper CBP 7596).

2. Trends in UK party membership

2.1 About the data

Political parties are under no official obligation to publish membership data. There is no commonly agreed definition of “party membership” nor any official body to monitor it. These three factors, together with continually evolving membership structures, mean that the quality of available data varies between parties and over time.

There are three main source types for party membership data:

Figures cited in submissions to the Electoral Commission

Many parties provide party membership figures for the year ending 31 December in annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission. All parties are required to submit these accounts by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000); however, they are not obliged to include membership data. When annual accounts do include these figures, they are probably the most reliable estimates available. The charts and tables throughout this paper use these figures wherever possible.

Party press releases

Party press releases (or releases provided on request from party head offices) commonly provide the most up-to-date membership figures. However, they are both irregularly released - published at the whim of the party - and inconsistent over time and between parties. This is as parties are free to define and estimate “membership” themselves.

Media and academic estimates

Media and academic estimates can be used to supplement Electoral Commission submissions and party press releases. This is particularly necessary for the Conservative Party, which does not routinely publish membership estimates.

In many cases historical data series are only rough estimates and may overstate membership. Conservative membership prior to 1993 could have been exaggerated, as could Labour membership up to the 1980s. Now that political parties are required to publish their accounts, the figures (where given) are likely to be more reliable.

There is no commonly accepted definition of “party membership” or a “party member”. Some parties restrict the voting rights of certain members, for example, while others offer gradations in membership costs to suit a member’s desired level of engagement with the party. Most recently some parties have experimented with including social media followers within their membership or supporters total. Readers should be aware that what is meant by party membership can change – and keep this in mind when analysing membership data either between parties or over time.

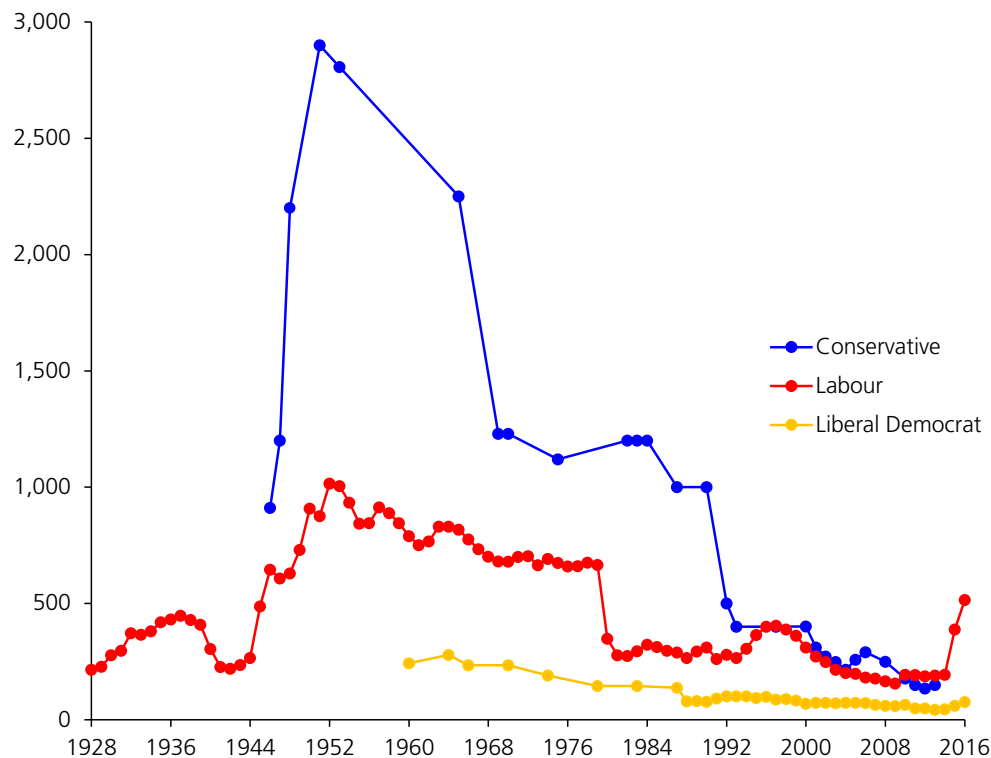
2.2 Historic trends: 1928 - 2002

On two occasions, in the years either side of the 1997 General Election and since the 2010 General Election, membership of the Labour Party has surpassed that of the Conservatives.

Membership peaked for both the Conservatives and Labour in the early 1950s. In 1953 the Conservative Party had a reported membership of 2.8 million; in the same year, Labour claimed over a million members. However, these figures are academic estimates and subsequent studies suggest estimates for both parties were inflated. Changes in monitoring practices introduced in the late 1970s improved the quality of Labour Party estimates; increased media and Parliamentary attention has encouraged improvements to Conservative Party estimates since the early-1990s.

Figure 1: Membership of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat* parties 1928-2016

Membership, thousands



Notes

* Including predecessor parties.

Labour party membership figures for 2015 and 2016 include party members and affiliated supporters, but exclude registered supporters.

Sources

David & Gareth Butler; British Political Facts (2011)

Patrick Seyd & Paul Whiteley; "British Party Members: An Overview", Party Politics, 10:4 (2004)

Susan Scarrow; Parties and their members: organising for victory in Britain and Germany (1996)

Labour Party annual conference reports

Conservative Home press releases (see section 2.3)

Labour and Liberal Democrat submissions to the Electoral Commission, 2002 onwards

Conservative Party

Historically the Conservative Party has not produced systematic membership estimates, though in recent years Conservative Home has quoted estimates from CCHQ. This reluctance to publish estimates is due to the structure of the party and the process via which individuals become full members.⁴

First, the Conservative Party is strictly speaking three separate organisations: the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations (responsible for constituency associations), the Conservative Central Office and the Conservative Parliamentary Party (run from the Whip's office). This fragmentary nature was confirmed in 1982 by the Court of Appeal.

Second, historically individuals applied to join their local Conservative associations specifically; that an individual became a member of the national union did not necessarily follow.

Conservative Party membership climbed steeply after the Second World War, from about 910,000 in 1946 to a reported record high of 2.8 million in 1953. The Conservatives had more individual members than any other party up to the mid-1990s, when there were about 400,000 Conservative Party members.

Labour Party

The Labour Party has published figures for individual membership since 1928. Until 2004 figures were provided in the annual Conference Report published by the Party's National Executive Committee, and total membership is now recorded in Labour's financial statements.

Labour doubled its membership between 1928 (when membership figures were first reported) and 1937. Membership was down significantly during the Second World War but rose sharply in the immediate post-war period. In 1952 and 1953 the party claimed over one million members.

Reported membership fell from 666,000 to 348,000 between 1979 and 1980, but the large decrease was probably due to a change in reporting standards and suggests Labour's actual membership before 1980 was exaggerated. From 1956 Constituency Labour Parties were forced to record a minimum membership of 800, which likely inflated the national total.⁵

Membership remained fairly constant throughout the 1980s before climbing in the mid-1990s following a recruitment drive. There was a fall in membership during Labour's time in office between 1997 and 2009, but it increased again in 2010.



⁴ Whitely, Paul; Seyed, Patrick; Richardson, Jeremy; True Blues: the politics of Conservative Party membership (Oxford, 1994)

⁵ Thorpe; Op. Cit.; p227

Liberal Democrat Party and predecessors

Since the creation of the Liberal Democrats in 1988, membership data have been available from the party's internal leadership and presidential elections and more recently from its annual accounts.

Academics Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley estimate that the Liberal Party had over 243,000 members in 1960.⁶ They estimate the combined membership of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party to have been approximately 145,000 in 1983 and 138,000 in 1987.⁷

In 1988 the newly created Liberal Democrat Party reported its membership to be around 80,000. The Party claimed about 100,000 members in the mid-1990s, falling to around 70,000 in the early 2000s.

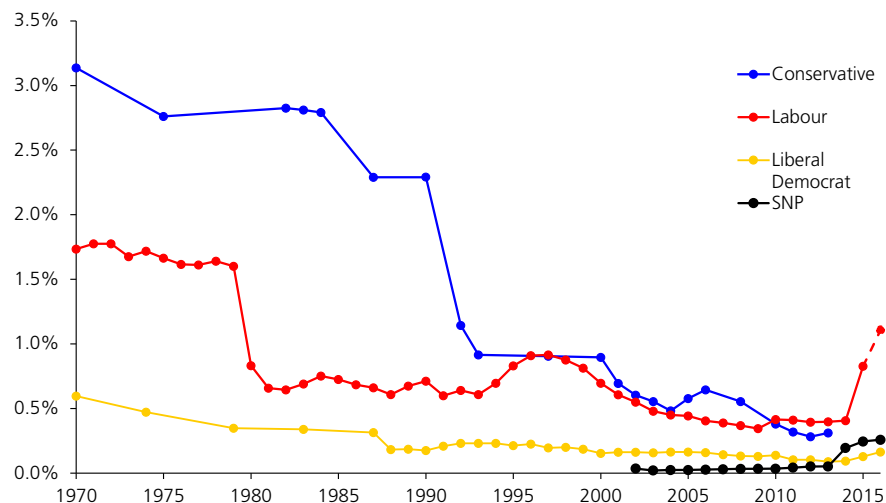


2.3 Membership as a percentage of the electorate: 1970-2016

Membership of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties has increased to around 1.6% of the electorate in 2016, compared to a historic low point of 0.8% in 2013. In 1970 membership of these parties was around 5.5% of the electorate. Labour Party members comprised 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 and 1.1% in 2016.

SNP members represent 0.26% of the total UK electorate, an increase compared to 0.05% in 2013. Across Scotland, assuming all Scottish National Party members are in Scotland, SNP membership increased from 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 to 2.9% in 2016.

Figure 2 Party membership as share of electorate, UK, 1970-2016



Sources

David & Gareth Butler; British Political Facts (2011)

Patrick Seyd & Paul Whiteley; "British Party Members: An Overview", Party Politics, 10:4 (2004)

Susan Scarrow; Parties and their members: organising for victory in Britain and Germany (1996)

Labour Party annual conference reports

Conservative Home press releases (see section 2.3)

Labour and Liberal Democrat submissions to the Electoral Commission, 2002 onwards

ONS Electoral Statistics 1970 – 1999 and later releases

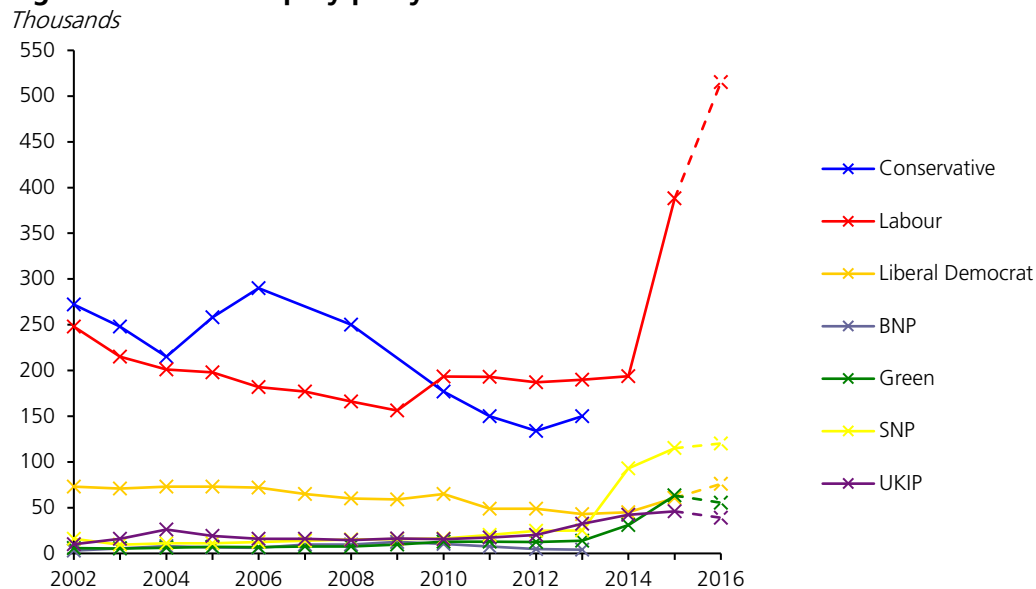
⁶ Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain, p10

⁷ Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley (2004), "British Party Members: An Overview", Party Politics, Vol 10 No 4, p357

2.4 Recent trends: 2002 - 2016

Figure 3 shows party membership figures as derived from annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission, data from Parties' Head Offices and, in the case of the Conservatives, media estimates. Where available, **figure 3** shows latest available figures for 2016 based on media reports and party press releases.

Figure 3 Membership by party 2002-2016



Sources

Prior to 2016 (All parties excluding Con) figures derived from party annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission year ending 31 December.

2016 figures, for all parties except Conservative, are based on information provided by Parties' head offices and recent estimates in news articles as of July.

Conservative membership figures derive from:

- 2002-2006 Daily Telegraph estimates;
- 2008 News of the World estimate;
- 2010, 2011 estimates reported by the Independent and Daily Mail;
- 2013, 2014 Conservative Home estimates;

Latest available estimates based on party press releases and media reports. See party profiles below for full details.

Note

Labour party membership figures for 2015 and 2016 include party members and affiliated supporters, but exclude registered supporters.

Conservative Party

CCHQ does not routinely publish its membership estimates. The latest estimate published by CCHQ, for December 2013, reported 149,800 members.⁸ As of July 2016, Queen Mary University Professor Tim Bale estimated that Conservative Party has between 130,000 and 150,000 members.⁹

Conservative Party membership fell by more than half from 273,000 to 134,000 between 2002 and 2013, although the decline was temporarily reversed in the mid-2000s.¹⁰

In September 2012 former Conservative Party Co-Chairman Grant Shapps announced the creation of Conservative Party "Friends".¹¹ Subsequently CCHQ has released membership estimates that, in addition to persons regarded as members in the traditional sense, "also tallies a larger figure for the wider party ...including donors, activist and others who play a supportive part but do not pay membership fees". In September 2014 Conservative Home reported this wider estimate to be 224,000.¹²

Green Party

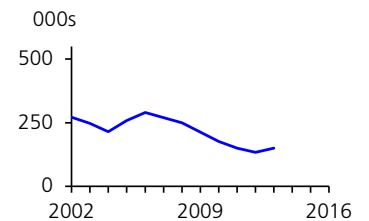
The Green Party (England and Wales) had over 55,000 members, as of July 2016, according to data provided by the Green Party's Head Office.¹³ This is a fall of around 6,000 members since April, when a party press release stated a total of 61,000. Across the UK, Green Party press releases claimed roughly 70,000 people are a members of the "combined UK Green Parties".¹⁴ As of December 2015 the Green Party (England and Wales) had 63,000 members, according to submissions to the Electoral Commission.¹⁵

Membership of the Green Party (England and Wales) held level at approximately 5,000 members between 1998 and 2002. Having steadied at around 7,000 members 2005-2008, it rose to 9,600 in 2009 and to 12,800 in 2010 (the year in which the party won its first MP).

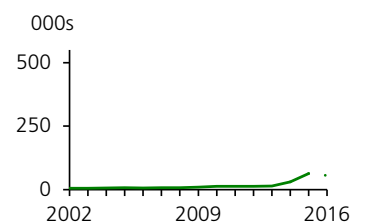
Charts and tables throughout this paper refer to the membership of the Green Party (England and Wales) only, as opposed to a combined "UK Green Parties" total, as the Green Party (England and Wales), the Scottish Green Party and the Green Party in Northern Ireland are each registered separately with the Electoral Commission. Membership to the Scottish Green Party stated in accounts ending 31 December 2015 was 9,001, up by 1,123 compared to the previous year.¹⁶



Conservative Party membership 2002-16



Green Party membership 2002-16



⁸ Mark Wallace (Conservative Home) [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 – up 11.7 per cent](#) (28 September 2014)

⁹ Tim Bale (The Financial Times) [Who, and where, are the Conservative party's members?](#) (8 July 2016)

¹⁰ Goodman, Paul (Conservative Home); [CCHO declares Conservative Party membership to be 134,000](#) (17 September 2013)

¹¹ Shapps, Grant (Conservative Home); Grant Shapps: [Yes, Party Membership will survive but it will change](#) (18 September 2013)

¹² Wallace, Mark (Conservative Home); [Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 – up 11.7 per cent](#) (28 September 2014)

¹³ Green Party head office information (figures as at 20 July 2016)

¹⁴ (Green Party press releases); [More Members than the Germans: UK Green Parties hit 70,000](#) (26 April 2015)

¹⁵ Electoral Commission (2016) Green Party (England and Wales) accounts as at 1 December 2015

¹⁶ Electoral Commission (2016) Green Party (Scotland) accounts as at 1/12/2015

Labour Party

Labour has around 515,000 members (including party members and affiliated supporters – see section 2.5 for further details), as of July 2016, according to figures published by Labour Party’s General Secretary Iain McNicol.¹⁷ This is the highest number since the late 1970s. Recent media estimates suggest a further 181,000 people have signed up as registered supporters ahead of September 2016’s leadership election.¹⁸

Party membership rose immediately following General Election 2015. 422,664 of people voted in the September 2015 leadership contest, in which 59.5% voted for Jeremy Corbyn.¹⁹ In December 2015 Labour party had 388,000 members, according to party accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission.²⁰

There was a fall in membership during Labour’s time in office between 1997 and 2009, but it increased again in 2010. In each year between 2010 and 2014 the Party’s membership has held level at approximately 190,000 members.

Section 2.4 provides further detail on the broader membership of the Labour Party, including estimates for registered and affiliated supporters.

Liberal Democrat Party

The Liberal Democrat Party had over 76,000 members, as of July 2016, according to Party’s Head Office (a rise of around 17,500 since the EU Referendum on 23 June 2016).²¹ This is the highest Party’s membership figure since 1994. A similar increase in Liberal Democrat party membership was reported after General Election in May 2015.²²

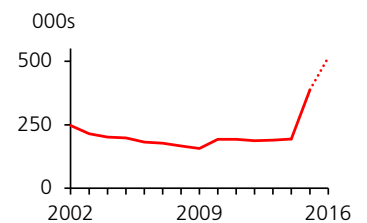
The Liberal Democrats claimed about 100,000 members in the early 1990s, falling to around 70,000 in the early 2000s. Membership fell sharply after the 2010 General Election, from 65,000 in 2010 to about 49,000 in 2011. In April 2014 the Party claimed around 44,000 members.²³

Plaid Cymru

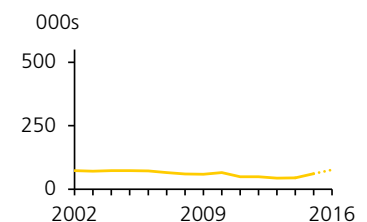
Plaid Cymru had 8,273 members as of July 2016, according to information from the Party’s Central Office. This is a slight increase compared to 8,015 in December 2015.²⁴ On 27 January 2012 Steven Morris of the Guardian reported the party’s membership as 7,863.²⁵



Labour Party membership 2002-16



Liberal Democrats Party membership 2002-16



¹⁷ Iain McNicol (Twitter feed) [UK labour membership figures](#) (figure as of 20 July 2016)

¹⁸ Conor Pope (LabourList.org) [Surge of registered supporters for leadership vote tops 180,000 in 48 hours](#) (21 July 2016)

¹⁹ Labour Party’s press release (Labour.org.uk) [Results of the Labour Leadership elections](#)

²⁰ Labour Party annual accounts for 2015 (Electoral Commission)

²¹ Liberal Democrat party head office information (figures as at 21 July 2016)

²² Speed, Barbara; [What does the Lib Dem membership surge mean for the struggling party?](#) (The New Statesman, 17 June 2015)

See also: Barford, Vasnessa; [Why do people join loosing political parties?](#) (BBC News, 16 May 2015)

²³ (Liberal Democrat Press Releases), [Lib Dem membership surge continues](#) (2 April 2014)

²⁴ Information from Plaid Cymru’s Head Office (2 August 2016)

²⁵ Plaid Cymru press releases); [Plaid publishes report to move the Party of Wales forward](#) (17 January 2012)

Scottish National Party (SNP)

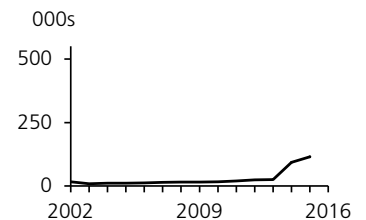
There are around 120,000 members of the Scottish National Party, as of July 2016. Around 4,000 new members joined the SNP following the EU Referendum on 23 June 2016.²⁶

Having recorded 16,000 members in 2002, membership of the Scottish National Party fell to 9,500 members in 2003. It has risen in every year since this time. Membership rose by approximately 1,000 new members each year to reach around 16,000 members in 2010. In 2011 membership jumped to 20,000, then to 24,000 in 2012. As of 31st December 2013 membership was reported as 25,000.

Following the Scottish Independence Referendum (18 September 2014) the SNP experienced a rapid rise in membership. On 23 September the party claimed its membership was on course to double its pre-referendum total;²⁷ on 10 October membership was reported to have reached 80,000.²⁸ A party press release dated 30 January 2015 stated the party had around 93,000 members.²⁹ According to accounts submitted to the Electoral commission as of 31 December 2015 Party had around 115,000 members.³⁰



Scottish National Party membership 2002-16



United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

UKIP has 39,000 members as of July 2016, according to the Party's Head Office.

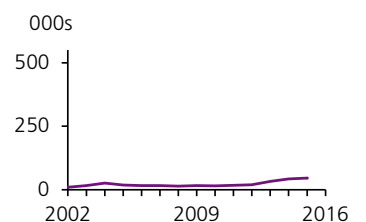
This is a fall compared to 2015, when membership averaged 42,500 across the year and peaked at 45,994 at the General Election.³¹ In 2014 UKIP membership have increased by almost 10,000 members, to 42,200 in December 2014, compared to 32,400 in December 2013 (according to accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission).

Increases in UKIP's membership in the past coincided with European Parliament elections. Membership initially jumped from 10,000 in 2002 to peak at 26,000 members in 2004 when the party won 12 seats in elections to the European Parliament (up from two previously). It subsequently fell again to 16,000 in 2006.

Membership increased every year from 2010 until 2015. Starting from 15,000, the Party claimed 20,000 members in 2012 and 32,000 as of the Party's submission to the Electoral Commission on 31 December 2013. On 16 June 2014 a party press release claimed around 39,000 members.³²



UK Independence Party membership 2002-16



²⁶ Information from SNP head office (20 July 2016)

²⁷ (Scottish National Party press release); [SNP on course to double membership](#) (23 September 2014)

²⁸ (Scottish National Party press release); [SNP membership reaches 80,000](#) (10 October 2014)

²⁹ (Scottish National Party press release); [SNP begins biggest ever members consultation](#) (30 January 2015)

³⁰ Electoral Commission (2016) Scottish National Party accounts as at 1/12/2015

³¹ Information from UK independence party Head Office (as at July 2016)

³² (UKIP press releases); [UKIP is delighted to announce yet another record membership figure](#) (16 June 2014)

2.5 Broader membership of the Labour Party

The relationship of trade unions to the Labour Party has changed in recent years. In March 2014 then Party leader Ed Miliband announced reforms at a special conference. Labour now has three tiers of members/supporters:

Party members: individual members pay an annual fee, are able to attend conference and constituency meetings, are able to represent the Party and, if eligible, vote in party elections (such as selection of party representatives, mayoral candidates and leader).

Affiliated supporters: affiliated supporters are members of an affiliate (levy paying) trade union or another organisation, full lists of which are available online.³³ They are entitled to attend all Constituency Labour Party member meetings and to attend Conference as visitors; they can vote in leadership, deputy leadership and mayoral elections. Affiliated supporters cannot represent the party, nor can they vote on the selection of party representatives.³⁴

Registered supporters: the Registered Supporters Scheme was created in 2010 following the Refounding Labour review³⁵. At the time registered supporters had paid a £3 fee and had the right to participate in leadership, deputy leadership and London mayoral elections. As of August 2016 the fee for registered supporters is £25.³⁶

As of July 2016 Labour had 515,000 members (including party members and affiliated supporters), of whom around 390,000 are eligible to vote in September 2016's leadership election. As Labour list reported, in July 2016, another 180,000 people had signed up as registered supporters ahead of voting.³⁷

In September 2015's Leadership election, won by Jeremy Corbyn with 59.5% of vote, 422,664 people voted. This included 245,520 members, 105,598 registered supporters and 71,546 affiliated supporters.³⁸

The broader Labour Movement comprises members of affiliated trade unions (ATUs) and the Socialist and Cooperative societies alongside official Party members (members of constituency Labour parties). Prior to the reforms of 2014, ATUs had half the votes at the Labour Party Conference. In 2011, the Party received £8.0 million from these affiliated groups compared with membership income of £5.2 million.

Up to 1992 The Labour Party Conference Report included membership figures for the ATUs and the Socialist and Cooperative (Soc&Coop)

³³ For a full list of Labour's affiliated Trade Unions, see the [Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation](#). For a full list of Labour's affiliated socialist societies, see the Party's [website](#).

³⁴ Collins, Ray; [The Collins Review into Labour Party Reform](#) (February 2014) pg. 23

³⁵ Hain, Peter; [Refounding Labour to win: a party for the new generation](#) (2010) pg 15

³⁶ Conor Pope (LabourList.org) [Surge of registered supporters for leadership vote tops 180,000 in 48 hours](#) (21 July 2016)

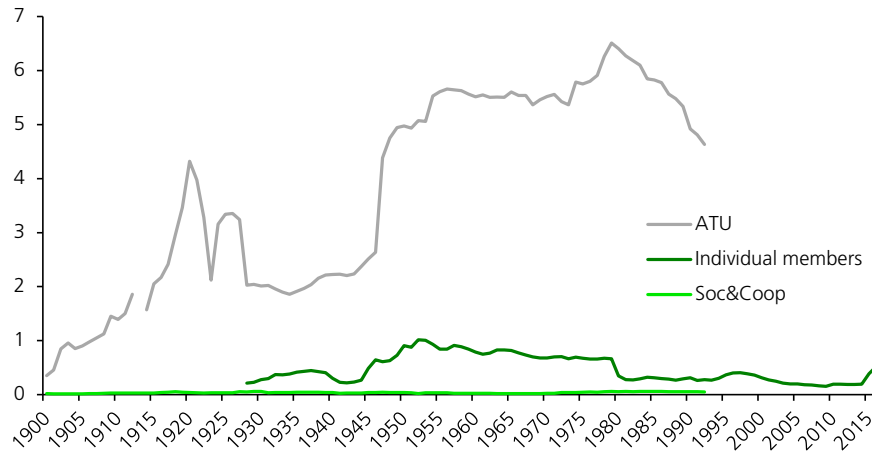
³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Grice, Andrew; [Labour ordered to vet members who apply to join party amid fears 'entryists' signing up to vote for Jeremy Corbyn](#) (The Independent, 4 August 2015)

societies. ATU membership rose rapidly in the years immediately following the Second World War. It peaked at 6.5 million in 1979, but then fell steadily over the 1980s. In 1992 ATU membership was 4.6 million.

Figure 4: Broader membership of the “Labour Movement” 1900-2016

Membership, millions



Sources

1. Butler & Butler; British Political Facts; 2012,
2. Iain McNicol (Twitter feed) [UK labour membership figures](#) (figure as of 20 July 2016)

Note

2015 and 2016 membership figures excludes registered supporters for

Individual party membership also increased in the immediate post-war period. In 1952, there were 1.0 million individual party members, representing about one-sixth of broad Labour membership. The sudden decline in individual members as a proportion of broad membership after 1979 is attributable to the likely inflation of membership figures before 1980.

3. Membership revenues

Labour received £9.53 million in membership fees in 2015, more than any other party. Party’s membership revenues increased by nearly 60% compared to £5.97 million in 2014. The Green Party’s (England and Wales) and SNP’s membership revenues have more than doubled. In 2015 the Green Party received £1.02 million compared to £0.43 million in 2014 (+146%) and Scottish National Party got £2.74 million, compared to £1.33 million in 2014 (+106%).

Income from party membership among other parties had increased slightly compared to 2014. In 2015 Plaid Cymru received £0.16 million (+16%), UKIP £1.02 million (+ 8%), the Conservatives £0.82 million (+ 8%) and the Liberal Democrats £0.81 million (+5%). **Figure 5a** shows percentage change in membership and subscription revenues.

Figure 5b shows party income from membership revenue for the years 2002 – 2015. Data does not include income from affiliation fees or donations.

FIGURE 5a: Percentage change in membership and subscription revenues 2014-15

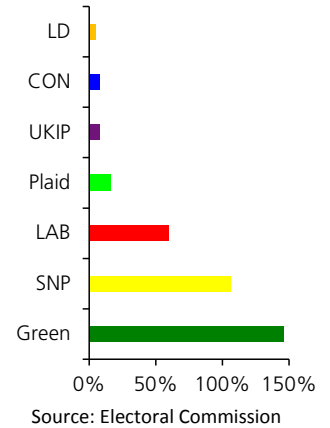
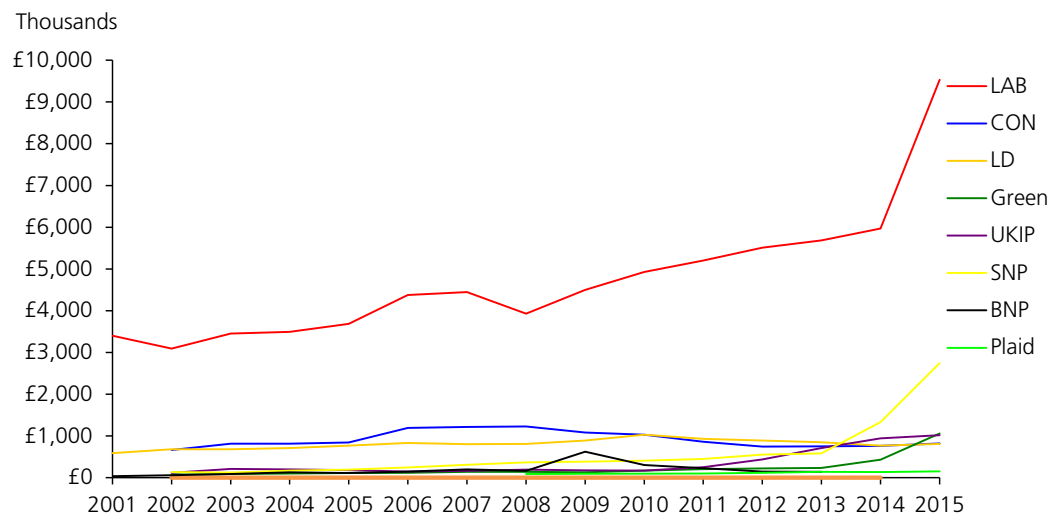


Figure 5b Income by party from membership revenues, 2002 – 2015



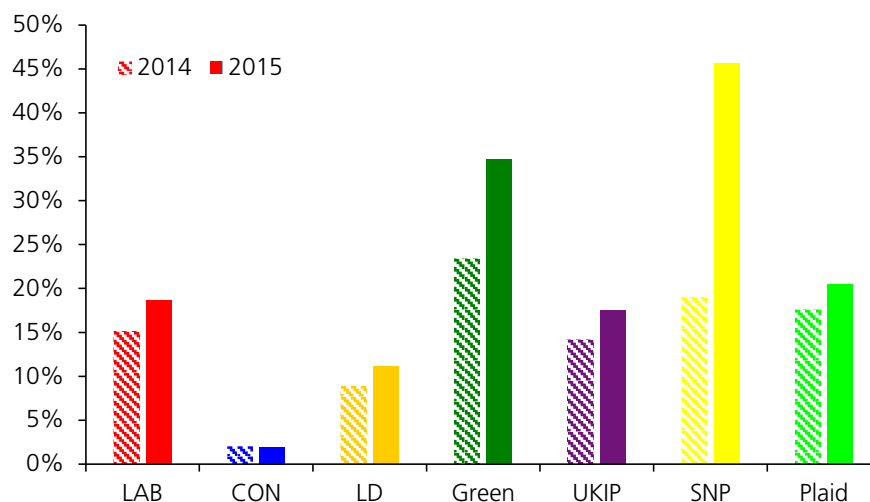
Source: Party annual accounts submitted to Electoral Commission

Income from membership fees increased and as a percentage of total income for all parties except the Conservatives. In 2015 membership revenues comprised:

- 46% of SNP’s income (up by 27% compared to 2014).
- 35% of the Green Party’s (England and Wales) (up by 11%);
- 21% of Plaid Cymru’s (up by 3%);
- 19% of Labour’s (up by 4%);
- 18% of UKIP’s (up by 3%);
- 11% of the Liberal Democrat’s (up by 2%);
- 2% of the Conservative’s (fall of 0.1%).

Figure 6 shows income from membership revenues as a percentage of total income for selected parties in 2014 and 2015, derived from accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission.

Figure 6 Income from membership revenues as a percentage of total income, by party, 2014 and 2015



Source: Party annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission

Labour's membership revenues have increased every year 2008 – 2015, rising by 143% over this period. Conservative income from membership fees fell over the same period by 33%, from £1.23 million in 2008 to £0.82 million in 2015. UKIP's annual membership income increased by £0.82 million (426%), from £0.19 million in 2008 to £1.02 million in 2015, while the SNP's increased by 647%, from £0.36 million in 2008 to £2.74 million in 2015.

Figure 7 shows party income from membership and subscription fees 2001-2015.

Figure 7 Membership and subscription fee revenue, 2001-2015
£ 000s

	LAB	CON	LD	Green	UKIP	SNP	BNP	Plaid
2001	3,399		590				36	
2002	3,093	665	680	78	119 ^a	136	60	
2003	3,452	814	680	87	210	126	92	
2004	3,492	814	710	100	199	169	129	
2005	3,685	843	769	114	181	195	115	
2006	4,376	1,191	832	118	148	244	145	
2007	4,447	1,214	804	142	167	311	201	
2008	3,930	1,229	808	140	194	367	166	89
2009	4,497	1,085	890	133	177	387	626	98
2010	4,927	1,031	1,028	170	170	408	305	
2011	5,205	863	930	206	254	449	228	102
2012	5,508	747	890	225	438	555	147	117
2013	5,684	749	850	237	714	586	142	140
2014	5,971	763	772	431	946	1,330		135
2015	9,532	823	808	1,059	1,018	2,743		156

Note

(a) UKIP revenues for 2002 refer to the sixteen month period 1 September 2001 to 31 December 2002.

Source

Party annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission

4. Social characteristics: party members & supporters

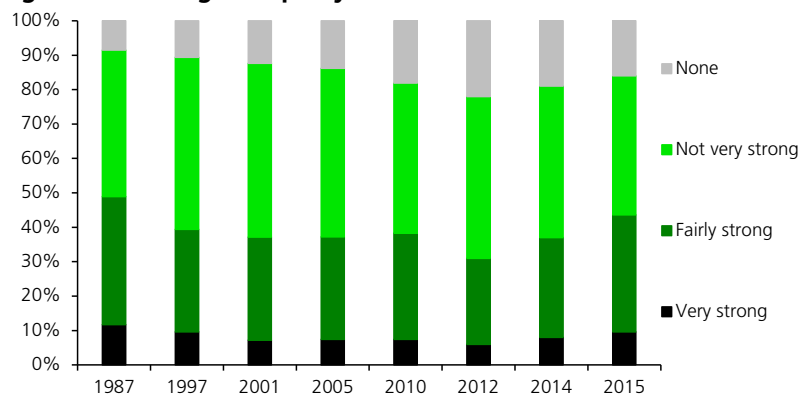
Identification with political parties fell to a historic low in 2012, according to the British Social Attitudes Survey, but has since risen to its highest level since 1987. Academic surveys suggest people of professional/managerial occupations are disproportionately represented among the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green Parties, while UKIP party members were more likely than their counterparts to have left school at 16.

This section uses a range of academic studies to examine the social characteristics of party members and supporters. Each study cited below follows a unique series of assumptions and methods to combat this issue. Caution should thus be taken when making comparisons between each source.

4.1 Identification and affiliation with political parties: historic trends

Identification with political parties fell between 1987 and 2012, successive British Social Attitudes Surveys suggest. In 1987 the proportion of the public who identified with a political party 'very' or 'fairly' strongly was 46%, compared to 31% in 2012. Over the same period the proportion who felt no identification with a political party rose from 8% in 1987 to 22% in 2012.

Figure 8a: Strength of party identification



Source: British Social Attitudes Survey

Party identification may, however, again be on the rise. Having reached a historic low in 2012, the proportion who identify with a party 'very' or 'fairly' strongly rose to 37% in 2014 and to 41% in 2015 – the highest level in any British Social Attitudes Survey since 1987.

Figure 8b: Strength of party identification, selected 1987 to 2015 (%)

	1987	1997	2001	2005	2010	2012	2014	2015
Very strong	11	9	7	7	7	6	8	9
Fairly strong	35	28	29	28	29	25	29	32
Not very strong	40	47	49	46	41	47	44	38
None	8	10	12	13	17	22	19	15

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey 33 Political report, page 15

4.2 Social composition of party supporters

Surveying the social background of party members is difficult as they comprise such a small percentage of the UK's population. This renders traditional means of surveying ineffective.

Paul Whiteley's *Where have all the members gone?* (2009) and Ford & Goodwin's *Revolt on the Right* (2014) utilised large survey samples and other techniques to combat this problem. These techniques are not flawless and do not capture the rapid changes in membership experienced in 2015 and 2016; even so these studies offer informed estimates.³⁹

In Whiteley's study, conducted in 2008, 27.7% of party members described themselves as retired compared to 18.9% of electors. Members of a political party were also more likely to hold either professional or managerial status than the wider electorate. While over half (59.3%) of party members held either professional or managerial status, under half (42.8%) of electors were found to do so.

Gender marked the largest disparity between the social make up of party members and electors. While 50.1% of electors were male, 67.2% of party members were.

Robert Ford's and Matthew Goodwin's 2014 book *Revolt on the Right* surveyed the social characteristics of UKIP supporters compared to those of other UK political parties.⁴⁰ With a sample of around 124,000 British voters between April 2004 and April 2013, Ford and Goodwin were able to build a detailed picture of those who stated support for a political party.⁴¹

Figure 9: Social characteristics of those stating support for a given political party (%), April 2004 - April 2013

	Con	Lab	Lib	Greens	Ukip	BNP**	Sample
Social class							
Professional/managerial middle class	44	36	43	44	30	22	39
Routine non-manual*	28	29	29	27	27	23	28
Working class/other/never worked	28	35	27	28	42	55	33
Education/age left school							
16 or younger	36	40	31	21	55	62	38
17 or 18	24	20	19	18	21	19	21
19 or older	40	40	50	60	24	19	41
Gender							
Male	49	49	47	46	57	64	50
Female	51	51	53	54	43	36	50
Age							
Under 35	24	28	32	37	12	20	26
35-54	32	38	33	35	31	41	34
55 plus	44	34	35	28	57	39	39
Ethnicity							
White	99	96	98	98	100	100	98
Non-white	1	4	2	2	0	1	2

Notes: *clerical, sales, services; ** For years 2007-2013.

Source: Ford & Goodwin; *Revolt on the Right* 19 Membership of UK 007-2013

³⁹ Whiteley, Paul; "Where have all the members gone"; Parliamentary Affairs Vol. 62 No. 2 (2009), p. 242-257

⁴⁰ "Supporters" are those people expressing "fairly strong" or "very strong" support for a given party

⁴¹ 7 Ford & Goodwin; Op.Cit.; pp. 149-151

They found people with a working class occupation were in the majority among UKIP supporters. Alternatively, people of professional/managerial occupations dominated within the Conservative, Liberal Democrats and Green Parties. The proportion of supporters from middle and working class occupations within Labour was approximately balanced.

The age at which a voter left education was also distinct between parties. 60% of Green Party supporters left education at 19 or older, as did 50% of Liberal Democrat and 40% of Conservative supporters. An equal proportion of Labour supporters had either left education at 16 or younger or at 19 or older. UKIP supporters were, in contrast, more likely to have left school at 16 or younger.

4.3 Voting intentions – the rise of “other”

The rise in support for parties other than the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats seen in membership data was reflected in the results of the May 2015 General Election.

24.9% of the vote went to parties other than the Conservatives, Labour or the Liberal Democrats in May 2015, the highest share of the vote won by “other” parties at any General Election since 1945. In comparison, in 2010 “other” parties collectively won 12% of the vote - and at each election 1950-1964 just one percent.

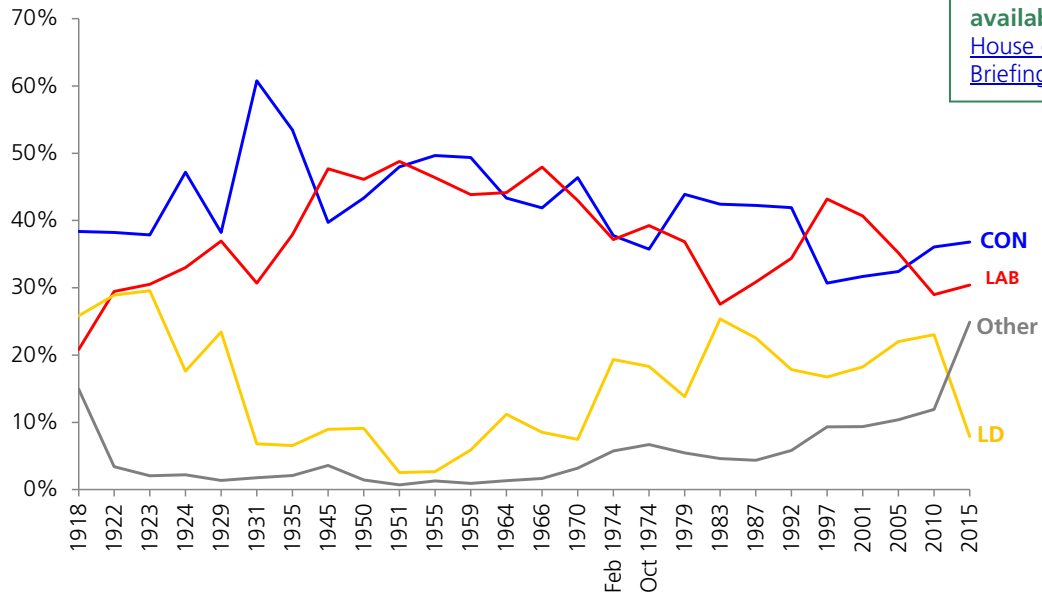
Figure 10 (on the next page) shows the rise in the share of the vote gained by “other” parties at General Elections since 1945. Between 1945 and 1970 the three main parties won between 96%-99% of the vote at each General Election. The three main parties won 99% of the vote in every General Election 1950-1964 and 98% of the vote in the 1966 General Election.

The sustained rise of “other” parties began in 1987. The share of the vote won by the three main parties has fallen in every General Election since 1987, in which the three main parties won 96% of the vote and “others” 4%. In 1992 “others” won 6% of the vote, 9% in 1997 and 2001, 10% in 2005 and 12% in 2010.

In May 2015 24.9% of the vote went to “other” parties. Specifically, the SNP won 4.7% of the vote, UKIP 12.6%, the Green Party 3.4% and Plaid Cymru 0.6%. The SNP, UKIP and the Green Party all won their highest ever shares of the vote at this election.

Figure 10 Share of the vote by the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and “other” parties at UK general elections 1918 - 2015

Detailed analysis of Election in UK since 1918 is available in:
[House of Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-7529](#)



Note

Liberal vote share includes votes for Liberal/SDP alliance (1983-87) and Liberal Democrats from 1992. Figures for 1918 include all Ireland.

Source

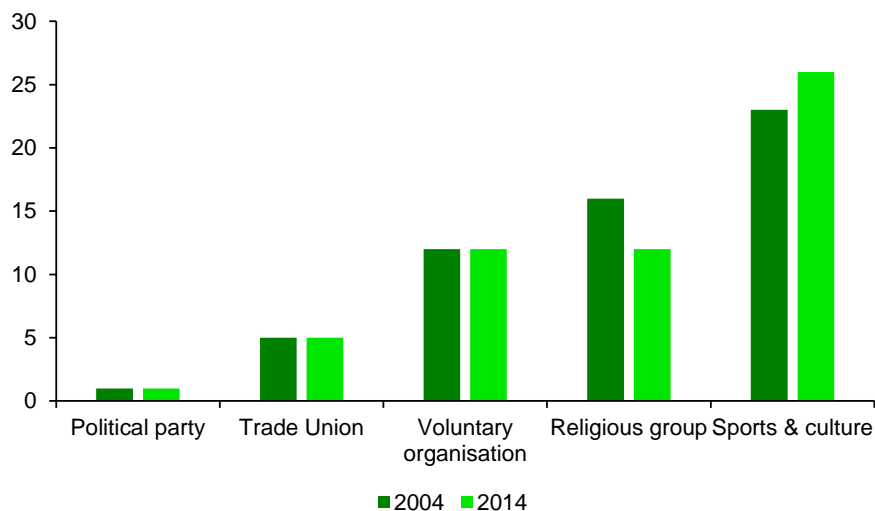
[House of Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-7529](#)

5. Non-party political activity and engagement

In 2015, Trade union membership was at its lowest level since 1945, according to the Certification Office. It remains, nonetheless, higher than party membership levels by an order of magnitude. In contrast, interest in politics has remained relatively constant since 1986; and in fact rose in 2015 compared to 2014.

Active membership of a variety of organisations, the 32nd British Social Attitudes survey shows, is relatively low. 26% of people in 2014 described themselves as an active member of a sports, leisure or cultural group, 12% of a religious group and 12% of a voluntary organisation. Nonetheless, this remains notably above political party membership: 1% of people in 2014 described themselves as an active member of a political party.

Figure 11 Percentage of people actively participating in selected organisations (%)



Source: [British Social Attitudes Survey 32 Politics report](#), page 5

The BSA survey shows that, in 2014, a further 7% of respondents described themselves as belonging to but not actively participating in a political party. This is likely an exaggeration of the true percentage of political party members; as the BSA puts it, “some of our respondents were probably claiming psychological rather than paid membership.”

5.1 Interest in politics

Public interest in politics increased slightly between 1986 and 2015 despite a long term decline in party membership, the 33rd British Social Attitudes Survey reports.⁴² In 1986 29% of people said they were interested in politics either a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot'. In 2015 36% of people did so. The percentage of people to describe themselves as having 'not much' interest in politics or 'none at all' fell from 39% in 1986 to 32% in 2015. Interest in politics is lower among the young. The Office for National Statistics Measuring National Wellbeing Program (2014) found in 2011- 12 that 42% of adults aged 16-24 expressed no interest in politics compared to 21% of those aged 65 and over. Overall 28% of adults surveyed were 'not at all interested' by politics.⁴³

Despite this, the Hansard Society's 2016 Audit of Political Engagement suggests that interest in politics has increased. In 2016, 49% of 18-24 year olds surveyed described themselves as very or fairly interested in politics, compared to 32% in 2015. Similarly, the share of white population very or fairly interested in politics increased from 51% in 2015 to 60% in 2016. Interest in politics among BME population remained the same (35%).⁴⁴

Today's teenagers, however, may also be more interested by broader social issues than previous generations. A 2013 study by Demos, a cross-party think tank with an interest in citizenship and political participation, claimed that 66% of teachers surveyed thought today's 16 and 17 year olds were more engaged with social issues than past generations. Just over 20% of teachers thought 16-17 year olds to be more interested in party politics than previous generations.⁴⁵

5.2 Trade union membership

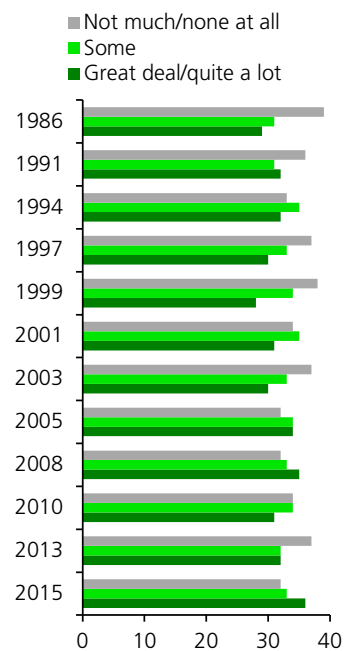
In 2014-15 there were 6.9 million trade union members in the UK, according to the Certification Office. This is the lowest total since 1945 according to records kept by the Department of Employment Statistics Division (1892-1974) and the Certification Office (1974-present).⁴⁶

According to the Labour Force Survey 6.5 million employees, around a quarter of UK employees, were trade union members in 2015. This is a slight increase from 6.4 million in 2014, the lowest total since the LFS began collecting UK data in 1995.⁴⁷

Trade union membership nonetheless remains, according to both data series, larger than party membership levels by an order of magnitude.

Figure 15 shows trade union membership in the UK since 1892. Membership peaked in 1979 at over 13 million employees, before declining sharply.

Figure 12: Interest in politics (%)



Source: Simpson, Ian; Phillips, Miranda; (British Social Attitudes Survey 33),

⁴² Simpson, Ian; Phillips, Miranda; ([British Social Attitudes Survey 33](#)) Politics

⁴³ Randall, Chris (ONS); ([Measuring National Well-being- Governance, 2014](#))

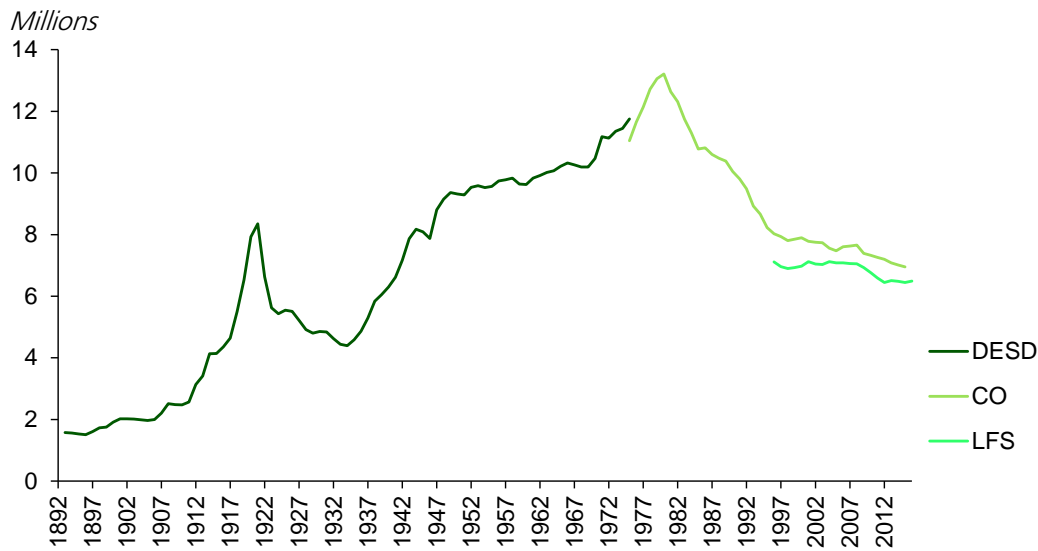
⁴⁴ Hansard Society; ([Audit of Political Engagement 13 \(2016\)](#)) pg. 37.

⁴⁵ Birdwell, Jonathan & Bani, Mona; ([Introducing Generation Citizen](#)) (Demos, 2014)

⁴⁶ Certification Office (2016) ([Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2015-2016](#))

⁴⁷ ONS Labour Force Survey 2015, ([BIS Trade Union Statistics 2015](#))

Figure 13a: Membership of trade unions in the UK, 1892-2015



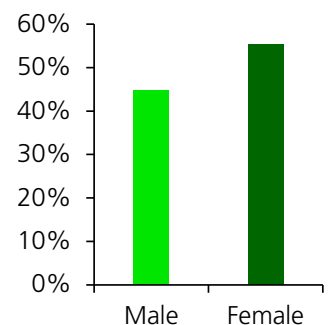
Source: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; [Trade Union Statistics 2015](#)

Female employees are now more likely to be trade union members than their male counterparts. In 2015 around 28% of female employees were trade union members, compared with 22% of male employees.

This is a reversal of the situation in 1995, when 29.7% of female and 35.0% of male employees were trade union members. Older individuals are more likely to be trade union members. 39% of trade union member employees were aged over 50 in 2015, but only 28% of employees are in this age group.

37% of union members hold professional occupations, compared to 20% of UK employees. Those holding associate professional and technical occupations account for 13% of members, caring, leisure and other service occupations 11% and administrative and secretarial occupations 9%.⁴⁸

Figure 13b: Trade Union membership by gender, 2015



5.3 Non-party political campaigns

This sub-section provides information on a range of organisations active in today’s political landscape. It is not intended as a comprehensive overview of all non-party political bodies.

CND

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was founded in January 1958. CND membership is thought to have peaked in the early-mid 1980s: in 1984 CND local membership was approximately 250,000 while in 1985 CND national membership was approximately 110,000. By 1988 this had fallen to around 130,000 local members and 70,000 national members. The Independent estimated that CND had 32,000 members in 2005. CND’s 2015 accounts reported a total income of around

⁴⁸ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; [Trade Union Statistics 2015](#)

£702,000, of which subscriptions and regular giving accounted for around £315,000.⁴⁹

Campaign to Protect Rural England

The 'Council for the Preservation of Rural England', later the Campaign to Protect Rural England, was formed in 1926 by Sir Patrick Abercrombie. The Campaign claims to have a presence in every English county and over 200 local groups. The charity's 2014/15 Annual Review claimed approximately 65,000 members. In 2014 around 41%, or around £1,658,000, of income was from membership and committed giving revenues.⁵⁰

Countryside Alliance

The Countryside Alliance was formed in 1997 in reaction to the newly elected Labour Government's pledge to ban hunting with dogs and to promote the rural economy. The Alliance's 2013 Annual Report states an income of around £3,160,000 from subscriptions (67% of total income). The Alliance currently claims around 100,000 members.

The People's Assembly Against Austerity

The People's Assembly Against Austerity was launched on 5th February 2013 with a letter to The Guardian, signed by numerous trade union officials, journalists and activists. As of July 2014 it had approximately 80 local groups operating across Great Britain and around 40,000 people are signed up to its national mailing list. On 20 June 2015 the Assembly claimed around 250,000 people attended its anti-austerity march in London, though this estimate cannot be independently verified.⁵¹ On 16 April 2016 as The Guardian estimates that: 'anything between 50,000 and 150,000 marched' in their event.⁵²

Stop the War coalition

The coalition was founded in September 2001 to oppose the "war on terror". 53 local groups are listed in Stop the War's main website, a list last updated in May 2013. The coalition claims to have organised around 40 national demonstrations. On 15th February 2003 it held what the BBC described as "one of the biggest days of public protest ever seen in the UK" against possible war in Iraq; the BBC estimated that around 1 million people joined the march, while police estimates placed the number at over 750,000.

⁴⁹ CND, [Council Members' Report and Financial Statements for year ending 31/12/2015](#)

⁵⁰ CPRE [Annual Review 2014/15](#)

⁵¹ (BBC News); [Thousands attend anti-austerity rallies across UK](#) (20 June 2015)

⁵² The Guardian - [The People's Assembly march was a display of anger – that's how change starts](#)

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