



BRIEFING PAPER

Number SN05125, 9 August 2019

Membership of UK Political Parties

By Lukas Audickas,
Noel Dempsey,
Philip Loft

Contents:

1. Trends in UK party membership
2. Broader membership of the Labour movement
3. Membership as a proportion of electorate: 1970 – 2019
4. Councillors as proportion of membership: 1975-2019
5. Who are party members and supporters?
6. Non-party political activity and engagement



2 Membership of UK Political Parties

Contributing Authors: Noel Dempsey

Cover page image copyright: [A delegate voting on a motion at Liberal Democrat Conference](#), by [NCVO London](#). Licensed by [CC 2.0](#) / image cropped

Contents

Summary	4
1. Trends in UK party membership	6
1.1 About the data	6
Historic trends: 1928 - 2002	7
Recent trends: 2002 – 2018	8
1.2 Conservative Party	9
Latest data & recent trends	9
1.3 Labour Party	10
Latest data & recent trends	10
1.4 Liberal Democrat Party and predecessors	11
Latest data & recent trends	11
1.5 Plaid Cymru	12
1.6 Scottish National Party (SNP)	12
1.7 Green Party	13
1.8 UK Independence Party (UKIP)	13
1.9 The Brexit Party	14
2. Broader membership of the Labour movement	15
3. Membership as a proportion of electorate: 1970 – 2019	17
4. Councillors as proportion of membership: 1975-2019	18
5. Who are party members and supporters?	19
5.1 Social composition of party membership	19
Geographic distribution of party members	20
5.2 Reasons for party membership	21
5.3 Party engagement	22
5.4 Identification and affiliation with political parties	23
5.5 Voting – the rise and fall of ‘other’ parties	24
6. Non-party political activity and engagement	25
6.1 Interest in politics	25
6.2 Trade union membership	26
6.3 Non-party political campaigns	27

Summary

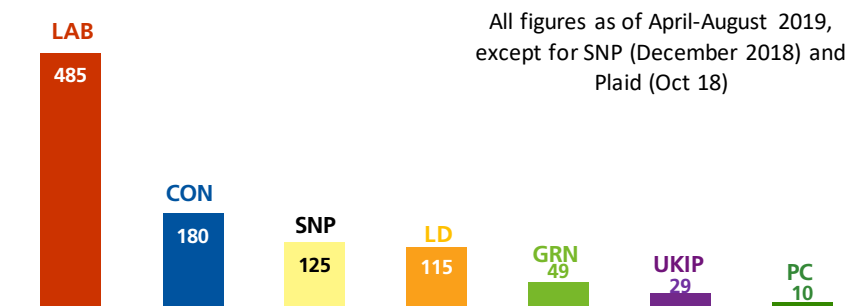
This paper presents party membership data published by the Electoral Commission together with the latest estimates from political parties' head offices, press releases, media reports and academic studies.

Latest available data (as of August 2019)

Estimates from political parties' head offices, press releases and media reports indicate that:

- The **Labour Party** has around 485,000 members, according to estimates published by Politics Home in July 2019.¹
- The **Conservative Party** has 180,000 members as of July 2019.²
- The **Scottish National Party** has 125,534 members, as of December 2018.³
- The **Liberal Democrat Party** has around 115,000 members, as of August 2019.⁴
- The **Green Party** (England and Wales) has 48,500 members, as of July 2019.⁵
- **UKIP** has around 29,000 members, as of April 2019.⁶
- **Plaid Cymru** has around 10,000 members, as of October 2018.⁷

MEMBERSHIP OF UK POLITICAL PARTIES 2019 (000's)



Source: Data reported by Green Party headquarters in July 2019, Labour- [‘Labour membership dips below half a million as tens of thousands leave party’](#), *Politics Home*, 23 July 2019., Conservatives from Conservative Party Chairman, [Tweet](#), 4 July 2019, Liberal Democrats, Federal Board Member, [Tweet](#), 3 August 2019, Party Membership Officer, [Tweets](#), July 2019; Plaid Cymru- [‘Plaid Cymru sees membership boost’](#), 12 October 2018, SNP figures- [Annual Accounts 2019](#); UKIP— [UKIP Leader to the BBC](#), 14 April 2019.

The latest available data suggests that in 2019 the Conservative Party is the second largest party in the UK, having fallen behind that of the SNP in 2018 (assuming that SNP party membership has not increased since December 2018). In 2018, SNP membership rose from 118,162 in April 2018 to 125,482 in December 2018, based on its annual accounts.

¹ [‘Labour membership dips below half a million as tens of thousands leave party’](#), *Politics Home*, 23 July 2019.

² Data from Conservative Party Chairman, [Tweet](#), 4 July 2019.

³ Information provided by Scottish National Party Headquarters.

⁴ Federal Board Member, [Tweet](#), 3 August 2019, Party Membership Officer, [Tweets](#), July 2019

⁵ Information provided by Green Party Headquarters.

⁶ Information provided by UK Independence Party Headquarters.

⁷ Plaid Cymru, [‘Plaid Cymru sees membership boost’](#) (12 October 2018).

Party membership as percentage of electorate

Membership of the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties has increased to around 1.7% of the electorate in 2019, compared to a historic low of 0.8% in 2013. Across the UK, the Labour Party's membership increased from 0.4% in 2013 to 1.2% in 2017, before falling to an estimated 1.1% in August 2018. Across Scotland, assuming all Scottish National Party members are in Scotland, SNP membership increased from 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 to around 3% in 2018.

Data published in annual accounts

Political parties are under no legal obligation to publish membership statistics. Many parties provide party membership figures for the year ending 31 December in annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission. The latest estimates released by the Electoral Commission shows that in December 2018:

- The **Labour Party** had 518,659 members, a fall from 564,443 in December 2017
- The **Scottish National Party** had 125,534, a rise from the 118,162 reported in April 2018.
- The **Liberal Democrat Party** had around 95,000 members, a fall from the 97,403 members in December 2017.
- The **Green Party** (England and Wales) had 38,707 members, a decrease from 42,413 in December 2017.
- **UKIP** had 26,447 members, compared to 23,280 members reported in December 2017.

The **Conservative Party** does not publish data on party membership in annual accounts. The latest estimates for 2019 (180,000), 2018 (124,000) and 2013 (149,000) were acquired from public sources and information from CCHQ. Similarly, figures for Plaid Cymru were obtained from public statements.

Characteristics of party members

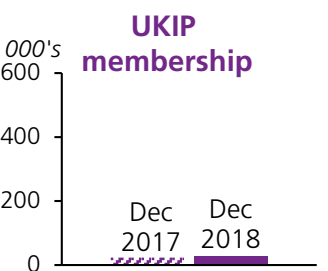
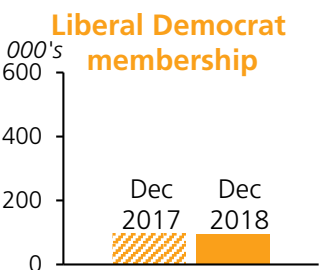
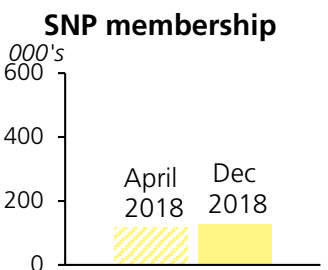
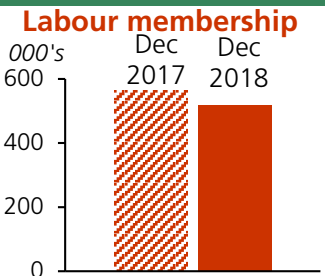
Academic surveys suggest that in 2017, more than half of members of parties in the graphs on the right belonged to a higher (ABC1) social grade. The highest rates of ABC1 members were among the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, the lowest among UKIP and SNP members. Fewer than half of all members were women and fewer than six percent have ever stood for an office within a party organisation.

Data Sources

This note uses a range of sources to examine party membership and support in the UK, specifically membership levels 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.

Calculation of party membership as proportion of electorate is based on assumption that latest party membership figures are accurate.

1B: MEMBERSHIP DATA IN ANNUAL ACCOUNTS



Source: Electoral Commission, [Party Annual accounts 2017 & 2018](#).

1. Trends in UK party membership

1.1 About the data

Political parties are under no official obligation to publish membership data. There is no 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.

Some parties restrict the voting rights of certain members, for example, while others offer gradations in membership to suit a member's level of engagement with the party. Most recently some parties have started to include social media followers within their 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.

There are four main source types for party membership data:

1. 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.

2. Data provided by party headquarters

Data provided on request from party head offices to the House of Commons Library is an alternative source of information. It is used for the latest estimates when possible.

3. Party press releases

Party press releases often provide the most up-to-date membership figures. However, they are irregularly released - published at the whim of the party - and inconsistent over time and between parties, as parties are free to define and estimate 'membership' themselves.

4. Media and academic estimates

Media and academic estimates can be used to supplement Electoral Commission submissions and party press releases.

In many cases historical data series are only rough estimates and may misrepresent membership. Conservative membership prior to 1993 could have been exaggerated and the same may have been the case for 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.

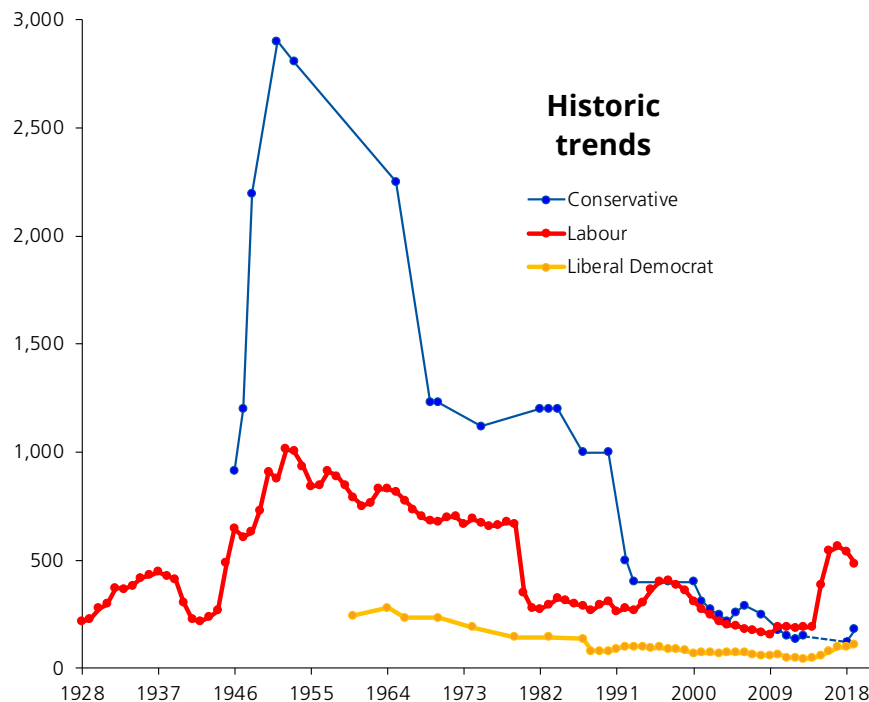
Historic trends: 1928 - 2002

In two periods, 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.

1c. MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONSERVATIVE, LABOUR AND LIBERAL DEMOCRAT* PARTY

Membership, thousands, 1928-2019



Notes: * Including predecessor parties.

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

Sources:

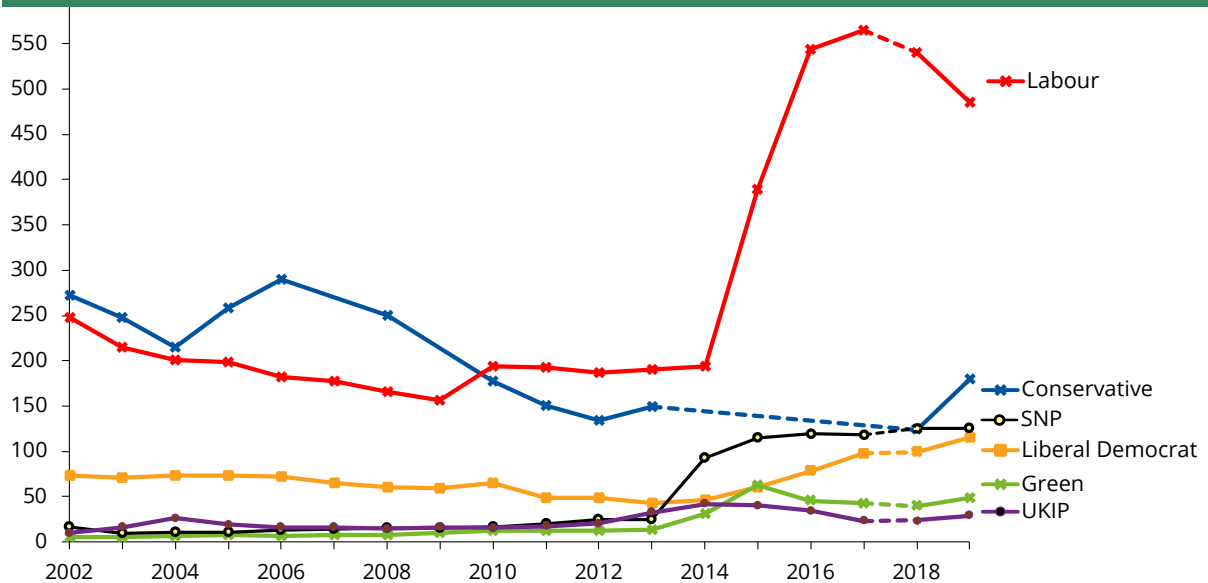
1. David and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts* (2011).
2. Patrick Seyd & Paul Whiteley, '[British Party Members: An Overview](#)', *Party Politics*, 10:4 (2004).
3. Susan Scarrow, *Parties and their members: organising for victory in Britain and Germany* (1996).
4. [Party Annual Accounts](#) submitted to the Electoral Commission when available.
5. Latest data:
 - '[Labour membership dips below half a million as tens of thousands leave party](#)', *Politics Home*, 23 July 2019.
 - Conservatives— Chairman Brandon Lewis, [Twitter](#), 4 July 2019.
 - Liberal Democrats— Federal Board Member, [Tweet](#), 3 August 2019, Party Membership Officer, [Tweets](#), July 2019

Recent trends: 2002 – 2018

Figure 1d shows party membership figures from annual accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission, data from parties' Head Offices and, in the case of the Conservatives, media estimates.

1d. PARTY MEMBERSHIP BY PARTY 2002-2019

Thousands (as at December each year, latest data or from annual accounts, 2002-2019)



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

Sources:

1. Prior to 2016 (All parties excluding Conservative) figures derived from [party annual accounts](#) submitted to the Electoral Commission year ending 31 December.
2. 2016 figures, for all parties except Conservative, are based on information provided by Parties' head offices and recent estimates in news articles as of 2018.
3. Conservative membership figures derive from 2002-2006 *Daily Telegraph*; 2008 *News of the World* estimate; 2010-2011 estimates reported by the *Independent* and *Daily Mail* 2013-2014.
4. Labour – *Daily Mirror/The Guardian*, 5 February 2019; LabourList, '[Momentum celebrates hitting 40,000 members](#)', 9 April 2018; '[Labour membership dips below half a million as tens of thousands leave party](#)', *Politics Home*, 23 July 2019.
5. Conservatives— Chairman Brandon Lewis, [Twitter](#), 4 July 2019
6. Liberal Democrats- Federal Board Member, [Tweet](#), 3 August 2019, Party Membership Officer, [Tweets](#), July 2019
7. SNP figures from [Published Accounts to the Electoral Commission](#).
8. Information provided by Green Party Headquarters, July 2019.
9. UKIP— [UKIP Leader to the BBC](#), 14 April 2019.

1.2 Conservative Party

Historically the Conservative Party has not produced systematic membership estimates, though in recent years the CCHQ has done so infrequently. This reluctance to publish estimates is due to the structure of the party and the process via which individuals become full members.⁸

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). The Court of Appeal confirmed this fragmentary nature in 1982.

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

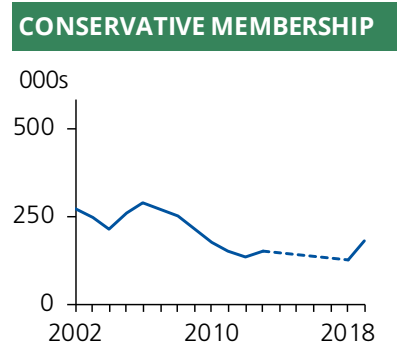
Conservative Party membership climbed steeply after the Second World War, from about 910,000 in 1946 to a reported record high of 2.8 million in 1953. The Conservatives had more individual members than any other party up to the mid-1990s, when there were about 400,000 Conservative Party members.

Latest data & recent trends

The latest membership figures were provided by the Chairman Brandon Lewis in July 2019, stating that the party had seen a rise from 160,000 members in May 2019 to 180,000 in July 2019.⁹ The previous official estimates of party membership were 124,000 in 2018 and 149,800 in December 2013.¹⁰

The 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.¹¹

In September 2012, former Conservative Party Co-Chairman Grant Shapps announced the creation of Conservative Party 'Friends'.¹² 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



⁸ Paul Whitely, Patrick Seyed, Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: the politics of Conservative Party membership* (Oxford, 1994).

⁹ Brandon Lewis, [Twitter](#), 4 July 2019; Brandon Lewis, '[Picking a new Prime Minister is an important task](#)', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 May 2019.

¹⁰ Mark Wallace, '[Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 – up 11.7 per cent](#)', *Conservative Home*, 28 September 2014.

¹¹ Paul Goodman, '[CCHQ declares Conservative Party membership to be 134,000](#)', *Conservative Home*, 17 September 2013.

¹² Grant Shapps, '[Yes, Party Membership will survive but it will change](#)', *Conservative Home*, 18 September 2013.

224,000.¹³ In April 2018, the Chairman Brandon Lewis suggested that wider Conservative membership ‘swelled to 500,000 if you include activists’.¹⁴

1.3 Labour Party

The Labour Party has published figures for individual membership since 1928. Until 2004, figures were available in the annual Conference Report published by the Party’s National Executive Committee, and total membership is currently 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 likely to be exaggerated. From 1956, constituency Labour Parties were forced to record a minimum membership of 800, which likely inflated the national total.¹⁵

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.

Latest data & recent trends

According to press reports, Labour membership stood in the region of 512,000 in February 2019, and fell to 485,000 by August 2019.¹⁶ In April 2018, an article published on [LabourList](#) stated that Labour had around 540,000 members.¹⁷ The latest official figure published in the Party’s annual accounts of suggest that Labour had 518,569 members in December 2018, a fall from the 564,443 members in December 2017, though this itself was an increase of around 20,000 compared to 544,000 reported in December 2016.¹⁸ Some press sources indicated that Labour membership peaked to 575,000 in July 2017.¹⁹ The fall in membership suggested in *The Guardian* and *Mirror* in early 2019 was



¹³ Mark Wallace, ‘[Conservative Party membership has risen to 149,800 – up 11.7 per cent](#)’, *Conservative Home*, 28 September 2014.

¹⁴ Camilla Tominey, ‘[Tories swoop on ‘unpatriotic’ Jeremy Corbyn as membership SWELLS in Conservative Party](#)’, *Daily Express*, 18 March 2018.

¹⁵ Andrew Thorpe, ‘[Reconstructing Conservative Party Membership in World War II Britain](#)’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 62: 2 (2009), 227.

¹⁶ ‘[Labour Party membership has dropped reveals leaked data](#)’, *Daily Mirror*, 5 February 2019; ‘[Labour membership falls 10%](#)’, *The Guardian*, 5 February 2019; ‘[Labour membership dips below half a million as tens of thousands leave party](#)’, *Politics Home*, 23 July 2019.

¹⁷ LabourList, ‘[Momentum celebrates hitting 40,000 members](#)’, 9 April 2018

¹⁸ Electoral Commission, [Labour Party annual accounts for 2018](#)

¹⁹ Alice Perry, ‘[Getting Candidates in Place](#)’, *Labourlist*, 20 July 2017; Lucy Fisher, [Twitter](#), 18 July 2017.

stated by the party to be the result of members being in arrears, rather than an absolute fall.²⁰

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.²¹ In December 2015 Labour party had 388,000 members, according to accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission.²²

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

1.4 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.

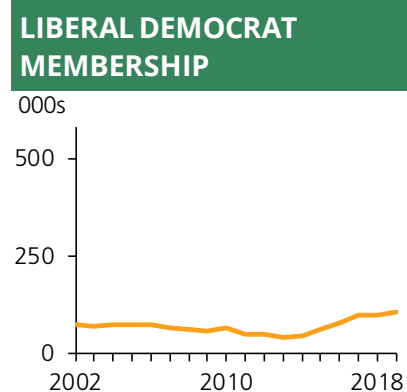
Academics Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley estimate that the Liberal Party had over 243,000 members in 1960.²³ They estimate the combined membership of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party to have been approximately 145,000 in 1983 and 138,000 in 1987.²⁴

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 early 1990s, falling to around 70,000 in the early 2000s.

Latest data & recent trends

The Liberal Democrat Party has around 115,000 members at August 2019, a rise from the 107,000 members in July 2019, according to party leadership contender Sir Ed Davey and Party staff.²⁵ This was an increase from 95,000 reported in Party's annual accounts as at December 2018.²⁶

This is the the highest membership figure since 1994 (102,000 members). Around 14,000 new members joined in the two weeks since



²⁰ [‘Labour membership falls 10%’](#), *The Guardian*, 5 February 2019.

²¹ Labour Party press release, [‘Results of the Labour Leadership elections’](#), 12 September 2015.

²² Electoral Commission, [Labour Party annual accounts for 2015](#).

²³ Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd, *High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain* (Michigan, 2002), 10.

²⁴ Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, [‘British Party Members: An Overview’](#), *Party Politics*, 10:4 (2004), 357.

²⁵ Liberal Democrat Press Office, [‘Lib Dems surpass record membership figures’](#) (8 June 2019); Ed Davey, [‘My reflections from the campaign trail’](#), *Liberal Democrat Voice*, 16 July 2019; Federal Board Member, [Tweet](#), 3 August 2019, Party Membership Officer, [Tweets](#), July 2019.

²⁶ Electoral Commission, [Liberal Democrat Party Annual Accounts for 2018](#)

the [2017] General Election was called.²⁷ Another increase in Liberal Democrat party membership was reported after General Election in May 2015.²⁸ A further 20,000 joined since the local elections in May 2019.²⁹

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 44,000 members.³⁰

1.5 Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru has above 10,000 members, as of October 2018. This was a rise from 8,000 members in April 2018.³¹

The *Daily Express* reported 8,273 members in 2017.³² This was a slight increase compared to 8,015 in December 2015.³³ In January 2012, the Guardian reported the party's membership as 7,863.³⁴



1.6 Scottish National Party (SNP)

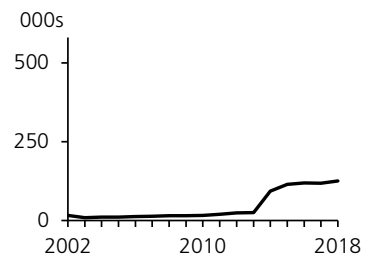
The SNP membership rose from 118,162 in April 2018 to 125,534 in December 2018, according to the accounts submitted to the Electoral Commission. This suggests that the SNP membership, larger than that of the Conservative Party in 2018, is currently the third-largest in the UK.

The SNP membership figures published by the Electoral Commission suggest that there were 118,162 members as at December 2017. This was a slight decrease compared to around 118,960 members in December 2016.³⁵

Having recorded 16,000 members in 2002, membership of the Scottish National Party fell to 9,500 members in 2003. 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 31 December 2013, membership was reported to be around 25,000.

Following the Scottish Independence Referendum (18 September 2014) the SNP experienced a rapid rise in membership. On 23 September 2014, the party claimed its membership was on course to double its

SNP MEMBERSHIP



²⁷ Membership figure reported to be higher than 101,768. Michael Wilkinson, '[Liberal Democrats hit highest ever membership on eve of local elections](#)', Liberal Democrats, 3 May 2017.

²⁸ Barbara Speed, '[What does the Lib Dem membership surge mean for the struggling party?](#)', *The New Statesman*, 17 June 2015; Vanessa Barford, '[Why do people join losing political parties?](#)', *BBC News*, 16 May 2015.

²⁹ Liberal Democrat Press Office, '[Lib Dems surpass record membership figures](#)' (8 June 2019).

³⁰ Liberal Democrat Press Releases, '[Lib Dem membership surge continues](#)', 2 April 2014.

³¹ Plaid Cymru, '[Plaid Cymru sees membership boost](#)' (12 October 2018).

³² *Daily Express*, '[Plaid Cymru Party Profile](#)', 2017 (reported figure 8,273 as at 2017).

³³ Information from Plaid Cymru's Head Office, 2 August 2016.

³⁴ Plaid Cymru, '[Plaid publishes report to move the Party of Wales forward](#)', 17 January 2012.

³⁵ Electoral Commission, '[Scottish National Party annual accounts for 2017](#)'.

pre-referendum total;³⁶ on 10 October, membership have reached 80,000.³⁷ A party press release dated 30 January 2015 stated the party had around 93,000 members.³⁸ According to the Electoral commission as of 31 December 2015, the Party had around 115,000 members.³⁹

1.7 Green Party

Based on data provided by the Green Party (England and Wales) headquarters party membership was 48,500 in July 2019.⁴⁰ This was an increase compared to the 39,350 members reported by party headquarters in August 2018. As of December 2015, the Green Party (England and Wales) had 63,000 members, according to submissions to the Electoral Commission.⁴¹

Across the UK, Green Party press releases claimed roughly 70,000 people are members of the 'combined UK Green Parties' in 2015.⁴²

Membership of the Green Party (England and Wales) held level at approximately 5,000 members between 1998 and 2002. Having steadied at just over 7,000 members between 2005 and 2008, it jumped 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 separately registered with the Electoral Commission.

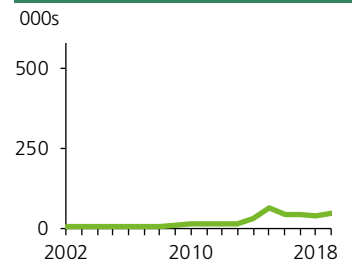
1.8 UK Independence Party (UKIP)

UKIP has around 29,000 members, as of April 2019, according to the party leader Gerald Batten.⁴³ This was an increase from 26,447 members in December 2018, but the April 2019 figures remain lower than the 34,000 seen in December 2016 (according to date from the Electoral Commission).⁴⁴

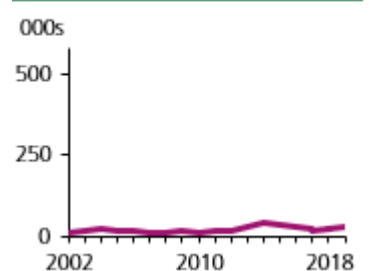
UKIP's membership averaged 42,500 during 2015, with a peak of 45,994 at the General Election in May.⁴⁵ In 2014, membership had increased by almost 10,000 members, to 42,200 in December 2014, compared to 32,400 in December 2013.⁴⁶



GREEN PARTY MEMBERSHIP
(England & Wales)



UKIP MEMBERSHIP



³⁶ Scottish National Party press release, '[SNP on course to double membership](#)', 23 September 2014.

³⁷ The Scotsman, '[SNP membership reaches 80,000](#)', 10 October 2014.

³⁸ Scottish National Party press release, '[SNP begins biggest ever members consultation](#)', 30 January 2015.

³⁹ Electoral Commission, [Scottish National Party accounts 2015](#)

⁴⁰ Information from Green Party Head Office, July 2019.

⁴¹ Electoral Commission, [Green Party accounts 2015](#)

⁴² Green Party, '[More Members than the Germans: UK Green parties hit 70,000](#)', 26 April 2015.

⁴³ BBC News, [Gerald Batten to Andrew Marr](#), 14 April 2019 (at 0.55).

⁴⁴ Electoral Commission, [UK Independence Party Annual Accounts](#)

⁴⁵ Information from UKIP Head Office (July 2016).

⁴⁶ Electoral Commission, [UK Independence Party Annual Accounts](#)

14 Membership of UK Political Parties

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). Membership subsequently fell again to 16,000 in 2006.

Membership has 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.⁴⁷

1.9 The Brexit Party

The Brexit Party was established in November 2018. The party has no members, only registered supporters. In June 2019, the party leader, Nigel Farage, stated that the party had 115,000 registered supporters.⁴⁸



⁴⁷ UKIP, '[UKIP is delighted to announce yet another record membership](#)', 16 June 2014.

⁴⁸ Sky News, '[Brexit Party reveals 100 "new politics" MP candidates](#)' (30 June 2019).

2. Broader membership of the Labour movement

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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

Registered supporters: the Registered Supporters Scheme was created in 2010, following the Labour review.⁵¹ At the time, registered supporters paid a £3 fee and they now have the right to vote in leadership, deputy leadership and London mayoral elections. As of August 2016, the fee for registered supporters is £25.⁵²

422,664 people voted, in the September 2015 Leadership election, won by Jeremy Corbyn with 59.5% of the vote. This included 245,520 members, 105,598 registered supporters and 71,546 affiliated supporters.⁵³

In the 2016, Leadership Election Jeremy Corbyn was re-elected with 61.1% of the vote. 506,438 people voted, of which 285,176 were members, 121,527 were registered supporters and 99,745 were affiliated supporters.⁵⁴

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.

⁴⁹ 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](#).

⁵⁰ Ray Collins, '[The Collins Review into Labour Party Reform](#)', February 2014, 23.

⁵¹ Peter Hain, '[Refounding Labour to win: a party for the new generation](#)' (2010), 15.

⁵² Conor Pope, '[Surge of registered supporters for leadership vote tops 180,000 in 48 hours](#)', *LabourList*, 21 July 2016

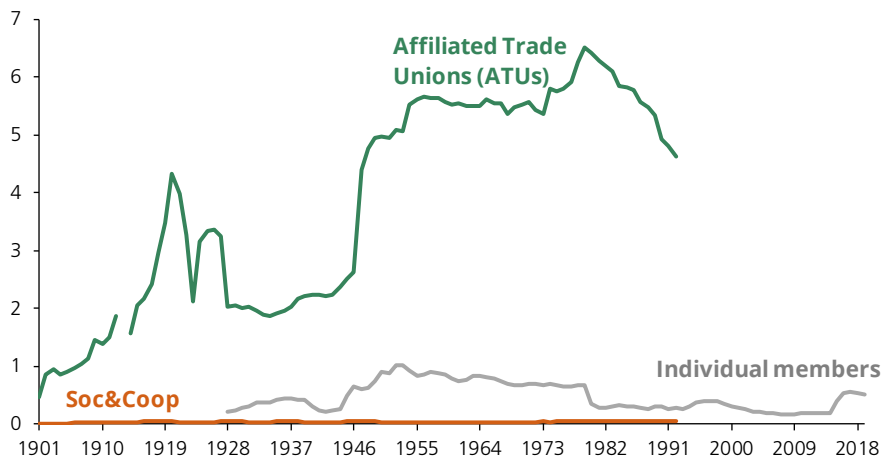
⁵³ Andrew Grice, '[Labour ordered to vet members who apply to join party amid fears 'entryists' signing up to vote for Jeremy Corbyn](#)', *The Independent*, 4 August 2015.

⁵⁴ Labour Party, '[Labour Leadership Election 2016 Results](#)'

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

2a. BROADER MEMBERSHIP OF THE 'LABOUR MOVEMENT'

Membership, millions, 1901-2019



Sources:

1. Historical data - David and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts* (2011).
2. 2016 - [Labour Party Annual accounts](#) submitted to the Electoral Commission.
3. 2017- James Tapsfield, '[Has Corbyn peaked? Labour membership falls by more than 4,200 in a WEEK - but still stands at 552,000](#)', *Daily Mail*, 30 January 2018.
4. 2018 - Alice Perry, '[Getting candidates in place for the next election — Alice Perry's latest NEC report](#)', *Labourlist*, 20 July 2017.
5. 2019- [Daily Mirror/The Guardian](#), 5 February 2019.

Individual party membership also increased in the immediate post-war period. In 1952, there were 1 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.

Momentum

Momentum is a grassroots campaigning network that evolved out of Jeremy Corbyn's 2015-election campaign. As of April 2018, it had over 40,000 members, a number also claimed in May 2019, when it had 180 local groups.⁵⁵ The April 2018 figure was an increase from 35,000 and 150 local groups reported in January 2018.⁵⁶ The organisation describes its activities as follows: 'Momentum supports the Labour party, and works to increase participation and engagement in the party to enable it to win elections and enter Government'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ LabourList, '[Momentum celebrates hitting 40,000 members](#)', 9 April 2018; *The Guardian*, '[Momentum urges Labour to adopt "radical" pledges](#)', 16 May 2019; Momentum, '[Have your say](#)' (accessed 15 July 2019).

⁵⁶ Ashley Cowburn, '[Momentum surges past 35,000 members with 'more than 1,000 members joining every month'](#)', *The Independent*, 18 January 2018.

⁵⁷ Momentum website, '[About Momentum](#)', accessed 31 August 2017

3. Membership as a proportion of electorate: 1970 – 2019

Combined Membership of the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties increased to around 1.7% of the electorate in 2019, compared to a historic low of 0.8% in 2013. Across the UK, the Labour Party's membership increased from 0.4% in 2013 to 1.2% in 2017, before falling to 1.1% in April 2018.

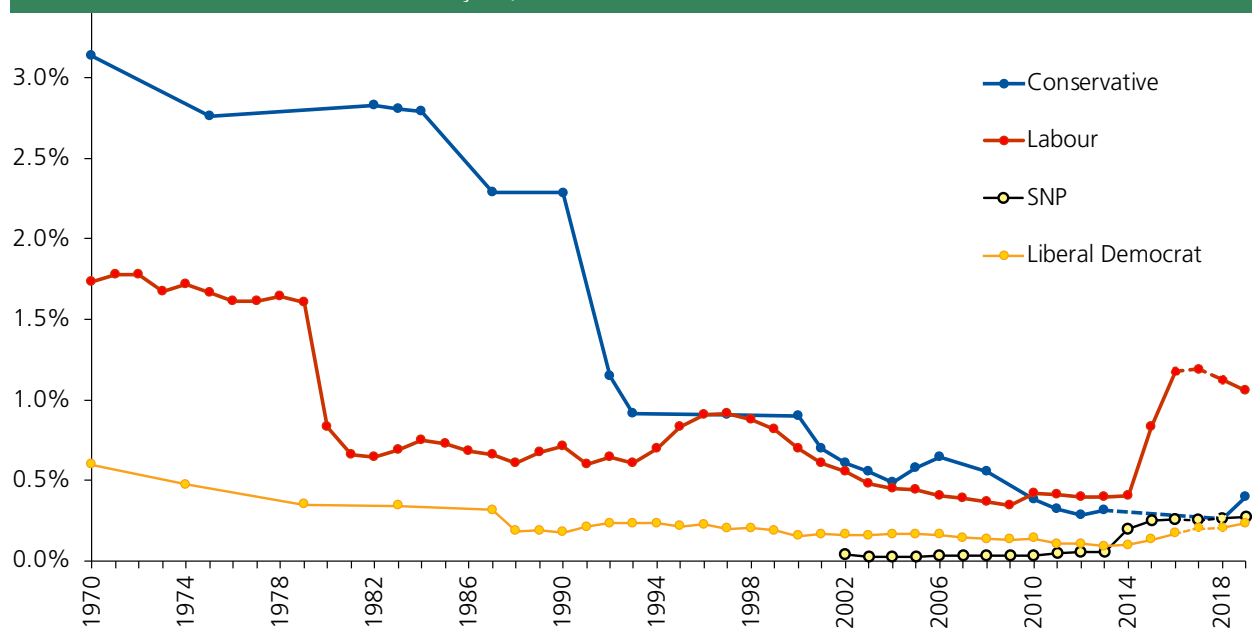
Across Scotland, assuming all Scottish National Party members are in Scotland, SNP membership increased from 0.6% of the electorate in 2013 to around 3% in 2017 and 2018.

In August 2018, the SNP members represented 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 3.0% in 2018.

Calculation of party membership as proportion of electorate is based on the assumption that latest figures are accurate based on information from party head offices and media. Electorate is as at 31 December previous year

3a. PARTY MEMBERSHIP AS SHARE OF ELECTORATE, UK

Where available as at December each year, latest data: 2019



Sources:

1. David and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts* (2011).
2. Patrick Seyd & Paul Whiteley; '[British Party Members: An Overview](#)', *Party Politics*, 10:4 (2004).
3. Susan Scarrow; *Parties and their members: organising for victory in Britain and Germany* (1996).
4. Labour Party Annual Conference Reports.
5. Conservative Home press releases (see section 2.3).
6. Labour and Liberal Democrat [Annual Accounts](#) to the Electoral Commission, 2002 onwards.
7. ONS [Electoral Statistics](#) 1970 – 1999 and later releases.
8. 2019: '[Labour Party membership has dropped reveals leaked data](#)', *Daily Mirror*, 5 February 2019; '[Labour membership falls 10%](#)', *The Guardian*, 5 February 2019; Information provided by Scottish National Party Headquarters; Conservative Party Chairman, [Tweet](#), 4 July 2019; Liberal Democrats, Federal Board Member, [Tweet](#), 3 August 2019, Party Membership Officer, [Tweets](#), July 2019

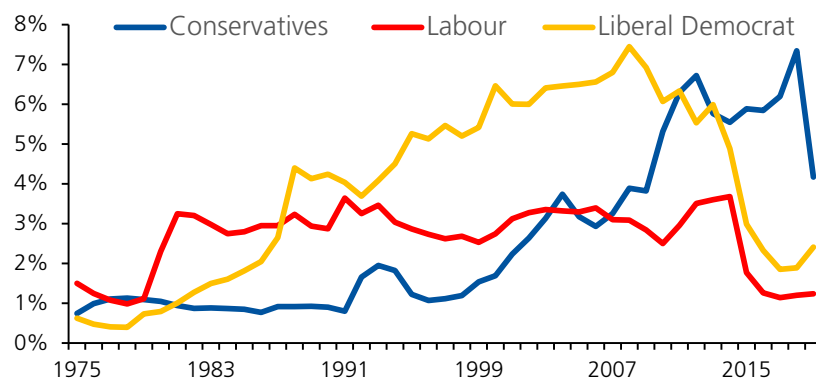
4. Councillors as proportion of membership: 1975-2019

Local councillors have historically represented a smaller proportion of the Conservative Party membership than either the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats. From 1975 to 1998, an average of 1.1% of Conservative members were councillors in any year, compared to 2.6% for the Labour Party and 2.7% for the Liberal Democrats and their predecessor parties.

From 1998 to 2010, the proportion of Labour members who were councillors rose slightly around 3.0% of membership each year, whilst there was a large increase in the proportion of Conservative members who were councillors in any given year: 3.1% on average from 1998 to 2010. Liberal Democrat councillors constituted an average of 6.4% of annual party membership in the same time period, peaking at 7.4% of the party membership in 2008.

Calculation of party members as proportion of membership is based on the assumption that latest figures are accurate based on information from party head offices and media. It and assumes no change of party allegiance by councillors after their election. In years where membership data is uncertain, the closest previous data has been used.

4a COUNCILLORS AS PROPORTION OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP (%), 1975-2019



Sources:

1. For party membership totals, see table 3a.
2. Councillor figures from House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, '[UK election statistics, 1918-2018](#)', CBP-7529 and Library Briefing Paper, '[Local elections 2019](#)'

Since the entry of Conservatives into government in 2010, local councillors have come to form a larger part of their membership, overtaking the proportions present in the Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties. In 2018, around 7% of the Conservative Party membership were local councillors, compared to just over 1% for Labour and around 2% for the Liberal Democrats. Aside from 2013, the proportion of the Liberal Democrat membership who were councillors fell every year between its 2008 peak and 2017. The proportion of Labour members who are local councillors has also fallen each year since its peak in 2014 (3.7% of membership).

As of July 2019, around 4% of Conservative Party Members are councillors. After the 2017 local elections, less than 1% of SNP members were councillors,⁵⁸ and around 2.4% of Plaid Cymru members.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Elections Scotland, '[SLGE 2017 Summary](#)'

⁵⁹ BBC News, '[Wales Local Elections](#)'

5. Who are party members and supporters?

In 2017, the average ages for party members of Conservative, Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrats ranged between 52 and 57; BME representation was low, ranging between 3% and 4%. 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.

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. Caution should be taken when making comparisons between each source.

5.1 Social composition of party membership

This section presents [Party Membership Project](#) data. This project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and runned by Tim Bale, Paul Webb and Monica Poletti - academics from Queen Mary University of London and University of Sussex.

In January 2018, Queen Mary's University of London's Mile End Institute published the [Grassroots: Britain's party members: who they are, what they think, and what they do](#) report, based on the YouGov survey data of over 5,000 party members across the UK. This report provides information on the demographic and ideological differences between Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, and SNP party members. This section presents data from this report and additional Party Membership Project data made available to the House of Commons Library for UKIP and Green Party.

Please note that data on UKIP and Green Party members in figures below is based on the smaller survey sample compared to other four parties and therefore is subject to higher uncertainty.

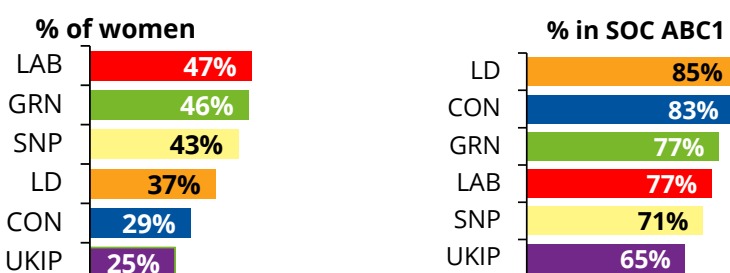
Gender

In 2017, almost half of all Labour (47%) and Green Parties (46%) members were women. This proportion was lower among other parties: 43% of the SNP, 37% of the Lib Dems, 29% of the Conservative and just of UKIP members are women.

Social grade

A majority of all party members belong to higher social class (ABC1) ranging from 85% of the Lib Dems to 65% of UKIP members.

5a. GENDER & SOCIAL CLASS OF PARTY MEMBERS



Source: ESRC-funded Party Members Project, Queen Mary University of London and University of Sussex, <http://escrcpartymembersproject.org>

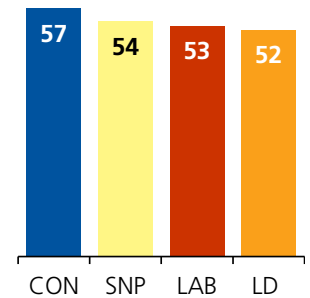
Age

In 2017, the average age of Conservative party members was 57, Labour 53, Lib Dems 52 and SNP 54.

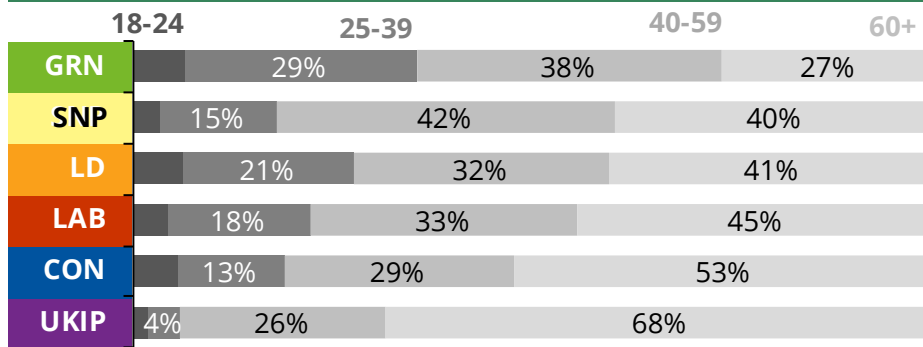
More than two-thirds of the UKIP's members (68%) belonged to the 60+ age category, compared to fewer than one-third (27%) of the Green Parties' members. More than half of the Conservatives (53%) also are over 60 years old.

18-24 year olds make up a similar proportion of Liberal Democrats, Greens and Conservatives, ranging from between 5% and 6%. The UKIP has a smallest share of 18-24 year olds (2%). Around 3% of the SNP and 4% of the UKIP members were aged between 18 and 24 in 2017.

5b: MEAN AGE OF PARTY MEMBERS (YEARS)



5c. AGE OF PARTY MEMBERS (% in each age group)



Source: ESRC-funded Party Members Project, Queen Mary University of London and University of Sussex. <http://esrcpartymembersproject.org>

Geographic distribution of party members

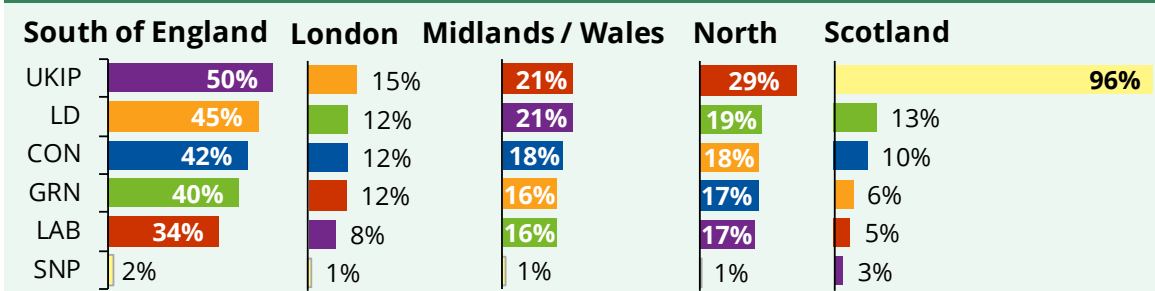
Data suggests that 96% of SNP members lived in Scotland in 2017. This party had around 1-2% of members in other areas shown in the figure below.

Excluding the SNP, the largest share of party members were in the South of England (outside London). Around 50% of the UKIP members lived in the South, followed by 45% of Liberal Democrats, 42% of Conservatives, 40% Green, 32% Labour and just 2% of SNP members.

In contrast, the smallest share of the Conservative (10%), Liberal Democrats (6%), Labour (5%) and UKIP (3%) members lived in Scotland, compared to other four areas listed below.

The Liberal Democrat Party had around 15% of their members in London area, followed by 12% of Labour, Greens and Conservatives members. Around 8% of UKIP and just 1% of the SNP members lived in London in 2017.

5d. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION* OF PARTY MEMBERS 2017



* Please note that this represents proportion of the total party members in each region and **not** the share of population in each party

Source: ESRC-funded [Party Members Project](#), Queen Mary University of London and University of Sussex,

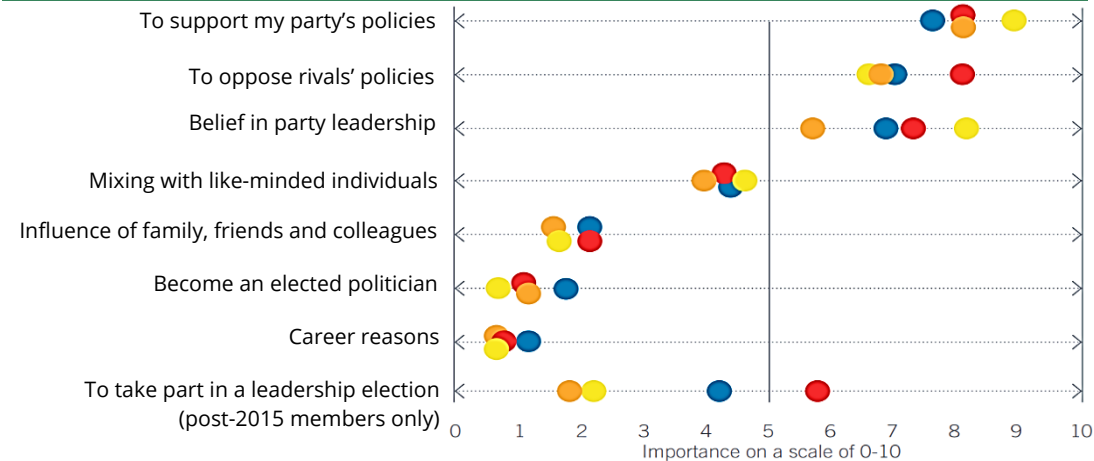
Around one-fifth (21%) of Labour and UKIP members were from Midlands or Wales, followed by 18% Conservatives and 16% of Liberal Democrats and Greens. Labour had just under one third of their members in the North of England, followed by 17-19% of Greens, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives and UKIP members.

5.2 Reasons for party membership

Members had varying reasons for joining their respective party, as evidenced in a scale of 1 to 10 of importance. SNP members were most likely to join to support party policies, ranked as 8.8 importance, whereas this was 8.1 for Labour and Liberal Democrats and 7.6 for Conservatives. SNP members also ranked belief in party leadership as a reason for joining higher than other parties, at 8.2. This can be compared to 7.3 for Labour, 6.9 for Conservatives and 5.7 for Liberal Democrats.

Amongst the benefits of being a party member, over 80% of all those surveyed agreed that party members can change the community or country. And over 60% of members agreed that getting active was a good way to meet interesting people. However, members across all parties also agreed that a downside of membership was that party activism often takes time away from one's family (Liberal Democrats 64%, Conservatives 60%, Labour 55%, SNP 50%).

5e. REASONS FOR JOINING POLITICAL PARTY 2017



Source: ESRC-funded Party Members Project, Queen Mary University of London, [Grassroots: Britain's party members: who they are, what they think, and what they do](#) (January 2018), 21.

5.3 Party engagement

Engagement in party related activities varies. **Figure 5f** represents the proportion of party members who frequently or occasionally engaged in selected ways in the five years up to 2017.

Just over half of UKIP (52%) and SNP (51%) members had at least occasionally attended a party meeting. Around a third (34%-36%) of Liberal Democrats, Greens and the Conservatives have done the same, compared to 23% of Labour members.

Compared with other parties listed below, the SNP had the highest share of members (70%) who displayed an election poster in their window; in contrast just 29% of the Conservatives did so.

68% of UKIP and 67% of SNP members have donated money to party funds, compared to 47% of Greens and 41% of Conservative members.

Nine out of ten Greens (89%) and the vast majority of SNP (86%), Liberal Democrats (83%), Labour (81%) and UKIP (80%) have at least occasionally signed a petition supporting party policies, compared to around a half (49%) of Conservatives.

Just under half (46-49%) of Liberal Democrats, UKIP and SNP members and over one-third (36-37%) of Greens and the Conservatives have delivered party leaflets. Just 28% of Labour members had done so.

Some 9% of Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Greens stood for office within their party, compared to 12% of SNP and 17% of UKIP members and just 4% of Labour members.

5f. ENGAGEMENT IN PARTY RELATED ACTIVITIES 2017

Members who engaged frequently or occasionally in the five years up to 2017

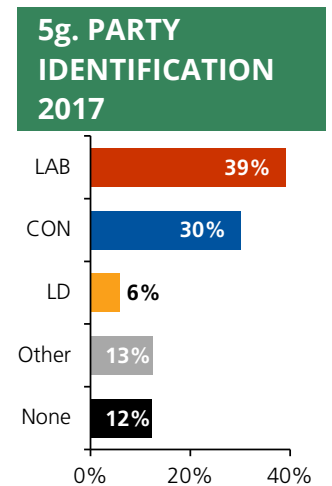
	Attended a party meeting	Displayed an election poster in your window	Donated money to party funds (over and above subscription)	Signed a petition supported by the party	Delivered party or candidate leaflets in an election	Stood for office within the party organisation?
UKIP	52%	55%	68%	80%	49%	17%
SNP	51%	70%	67%	86%	46%	12%
GRN	36%	56%	47%	89%	36%	9%
LD	35%	52%	59%	83%	49%	9%
CON	34%	29%	41%	49%	37%	9%
LAB	23%	57%	52%	81%	28%	4%

Source: ESRC-funded Party Members Project, Queen Mary University of London and University of Sussex, <http://esrcpartymembersproject.org>

5.4 Identification and affiliation with political parties

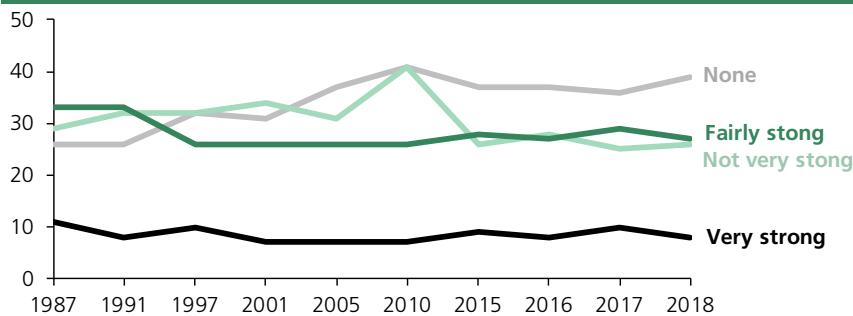
The 34th British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) suggest that around 39% of a total weighted sample of 3,014 respondents identified themselves with the Labour Party, followed by 30% who identified with the Conservatives in 2017. Around 6% identified with the Liberal Democrat Party and 13% with other parties. The remaining 12% had no party identification (see **figure 6g** on the right).⁶⁰

Successive BSA waves suggest that identification with political parties fell between 1987 and 2010, before rising in 2015. In 1987 the proportion of the public who identified with a political party 'very' or 'fairly' strongly was 44%, compared to 33% in 2010. Over the same period the proportion who felt no identification with a political party rose from 26% in 1987 to 41% in 2010, before falling to 36% in 2017.



Source: British Social Attitude Survey data cited in: Nuffield Trust, [Party identification breakdown for the 2017 British Social Attitudes survey](#), 28 February 2018.

5h. STRENGTH OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION (%)



Source: [British Social Attitudes Survey 36 The EU debate](#), 18.

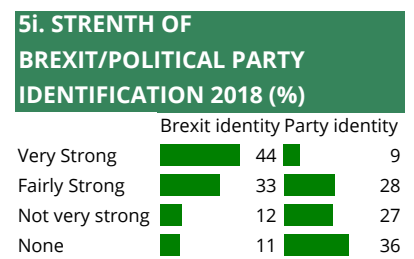
Having reached a historic low in 2010, the proportion who identify with a party 'very' or 'fairly' strongly rose to 37% in 2015 and to 39% in 2017 – the highest level since 1991.

By age, 43% of those aged 65+ in 2018 had a 'very' or 'fairly' strong party identification, compared to 30-35% for all other age groups.⁶¹

The prevalence and strength of **Brexit identities** appears to be stronger than attachment to political parties. Findings from the BSA suggest that, of those who voted remain in the 2016 referendum, half had 'very strong' attachment to remain, whilst 41% of leavers describe their attachment in similar terms. 13% of those who voted remain described their attachment as 'not very strong', compared to 19% of those who voted leave.

The Social Attitude Survey found that 67% of those who identify strongly with a political party also identify strongly as a remainer or leaver.⁶²

Similar findings, shown in **figure 5i**, were presented in the NatCen and 'What UK Thinks' report of 2018.⁶³



Source: John Curtice, ['The emotional legacy of Brexit: how Britain has become a country of "remainers and leavers"'](#) (2018), 8.

⁶⁰ British Social Attitude Survey data cited in: Nuffield Trust, [Party identification breakdown for the 2017 British Social Attitudes survey](#), 28 February 2018.

⁶¹ [British Social Attitudes Survey 36 The EU debate](#), 21.

⁶² [British Social Attitudes Survey 36 The EU debate](#), 21.

⁶³ John Curtice, ['The emotional legacy of Brexit: how Britain has become a country of "remainers and leavers"'](#) (2018), 8.

5.5 Voting – the rise and fall of ‘other’ parties

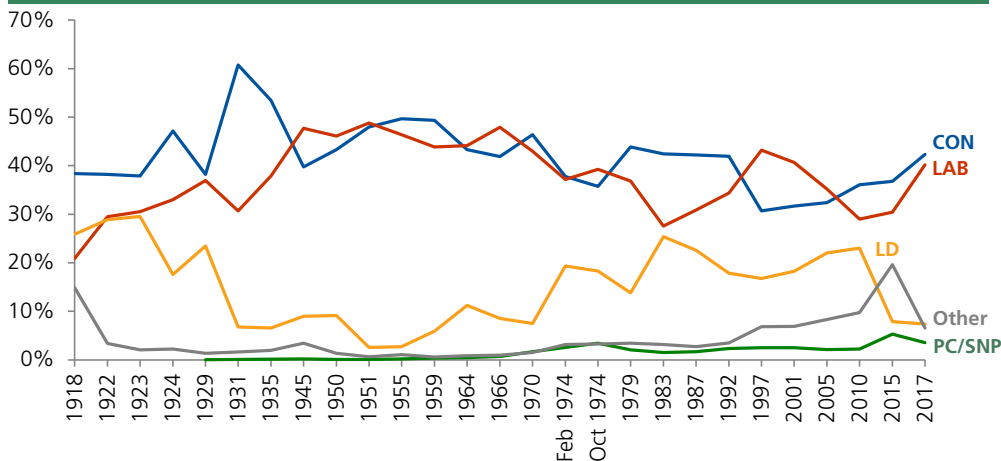
In the June 2017 General Election, the share of the vote won by parties other than the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats decreased to just over 10%, from about 25% in 2015.

The May 2015 General Election marked the highest share of vote won by ‘other’ parties at any General Election since 1945. This trend has changed in 2017, when the vote share of the UK Independence Party fell to under 2% from around 13% in 2015 and the Green Party vote fell from 3.8% in 2015 to 1.6%. In 2017, the Scottish National Party won just over 3% of the total UK vote, compared to around 5% in 2015.

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

5J. SHARE OF VOTE AT UK GENERAL ELECTIONS 1918-2017

By the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and ‘other’ parties



Note: Liberal Democrat vote share includes votes for Liberals pre-1983, Liberal/SDP alliance (1983-87) and Liberal Democrats from 1992. 1918 data includes all Ireland.

Figure 5j shows the change 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% and 99% of the vote at each General Election. The three main parties won 99% of the vote in every General Election from 1950 to 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 until 2017. In 1987, 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, almost 25% in 2015, and 10% in 2017.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ In this calculation the ‘other’ parties include all parties other than the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

6. Non-party political activity and engagement

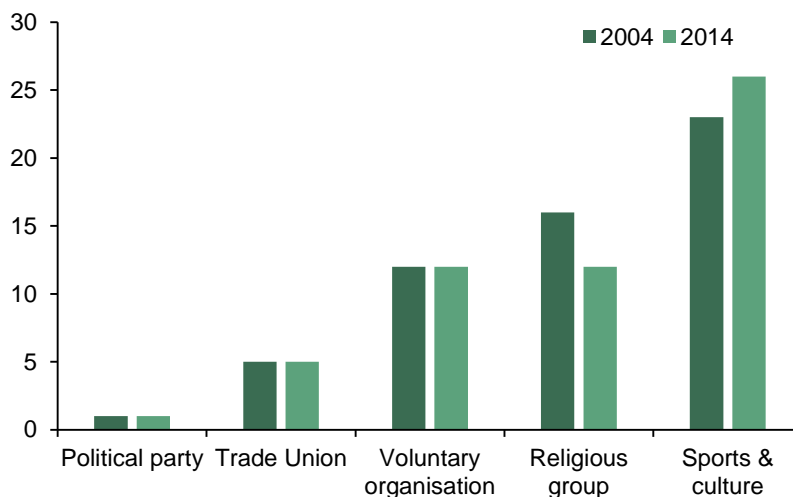
In 2017/18, trade union membership fell 2% on 2016/17 levels, being 6.9 million in number compared to a peak of 13.2 million in 1978, a fall of around 48%.⁶⁵ It remains, nonetheless, higher than party membership levels.

Interest in politics has remained relatively constant since 1986.⁶⁶

In 2014, 26% of people described themselves as an active member of a sports, leisure or cultural group, 12% of a religious group and 12% of a voluntary organisation. This remains notably above political party membership. In 2014, around 1% of people described themselves as an active member of a political party.

6a. SHARE OF PEOPLE IN SELECTED ORGANISATIONS

Actively participating in 2004 and 2014



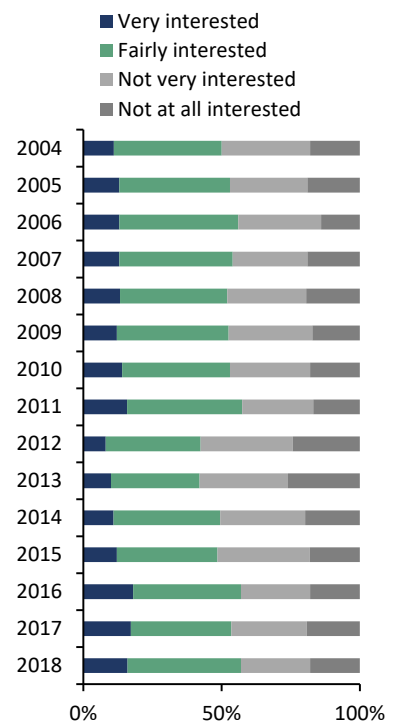
Source [British Social Attitudes Survey 32 Politics report](#), 5

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’.

6.1 Interest in politics

The Hansard Society’s Audit of Political Engagement 2018 suggests that levels of interest in politics increased slightly compared to the previous year. The share of white population ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ interested in politics increased from 56% in 2017 to 58% in 2018. Interest in politics among BME population increased greatly (48% compared to 34% in 2017).⁶⁷ In 2018, 41% of 18-24 year olds surveyed described themselves as

6b: INTEREST IN POLITICS



Source: Hansard Society; [Audit of Political Engagement 15](#) (2018), 37.

⁶⁵ Certification Office, [Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2017-2018](#), 24.

⁶⁶ Hansard Society; [Audit of Political Engagement 15](#) (2018), 37.

⁶⁷ Hansard Society; [Audit of Political Engagement 15](#) (2018), 38.

‘very’ or ‘fairly’ interested, compared to 50% in 2016, one group to experience a fall in interest.

Overall 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.⁶⁸ 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 describing themselves as having ‘not much’ interest in politics or ‘none at all’ fell from 39% in 1986 to 32% in 2015, after rising to 37% in 2013. 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.⁶⁹

6.2 Trade union membership

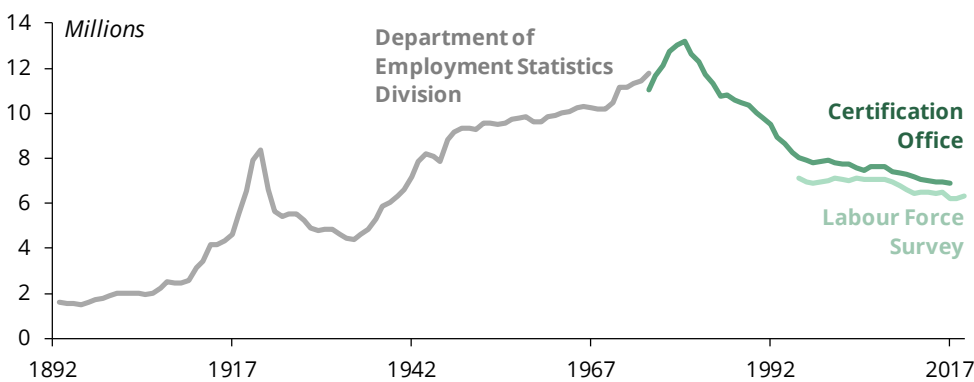
In 2017/18 there were 6.88 million trade union members in the UK, according to the Certification Office, a 2% decrease on 2016/17. This is the lowest total since 1945 according to records kept by the Department of Employment Statistics Division (1892-1974) and the Certification Office (1974-present)⁷⁰.

According to the ONS, 6.3 million— under a quarter of employees (23.4%) were trade union members in 2018. This was a small increase from 23.3% in 2017. This was a similar proportion to 2016 (23.5%) and a decline from the 27.4% of employees seen 2009.⁷¹

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

Figure 6d shows trade union membership in the UK since 1892. Membership peaked in 1979 at over 13 million employees, before declining sharply.

6d. MEMBERSHIP OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE UK



Sources: [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018](#)
 Certification Office, [Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2017-2018 \(2018\)](#)

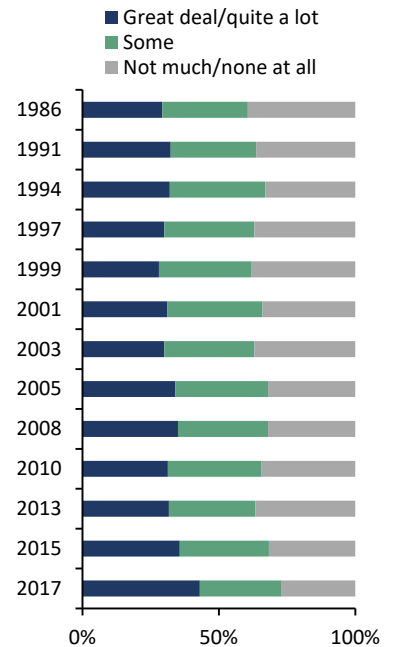
⁶⁸ Ian Simpson and Miranda Phillips, [British Social Attitudes Survey 33: Politics](#)

⁶⁹ ONS, [Measuring National Well-being- Governance \(2014\)](#)

⁷⁰ Certification Office, [Annual Report of the Certification Officer 2017-2018 \(2018\)](#)

⁷¹ ONS, Labour Force Survey 2016, [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018 \(2018\)](#); [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2017 \(2017\)](#); [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2010 \(2010\)](#)

6C: INTEREST IN POLITICS



Survey 33 and John Curtice and Ian Simpson, [Why turnout increased in the 2017 General Election](#), 5.

Figure 9b shows that female employees are now more likely to be trade union members compared to their male counterparts. In 2018 around 26% of female employees were trade union members, compared to 21% of male employees.

This is a reversal of the situation in 1995, when just under 30% of female and around 35% of male employees were trade union members. Older individuals are more likely to be trade union members. Almost 77% of trade union member employees were aged over 35 in 2018. Around 52% of public sector employees were union members compared to around 13% of those who worked in private sector.

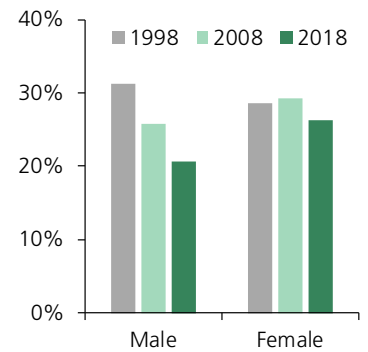
In 2018, just under 40% of employees in professional occupations were union members, whilst constituting 22% of UK employees overall. Around 12% of Managers, Directors and Senior Officials were members in trade unions, behind the 13% of employees in Sales and Customer Service Occupations.⁷²

The accommodation and food service sector had the lowest rate of trade union membership (3%), compared to almost half of employees in education sector (48%).⁷³

Some 87% of trade unionists were born in the UK, compared to 83% of the workforce.⁷⁴

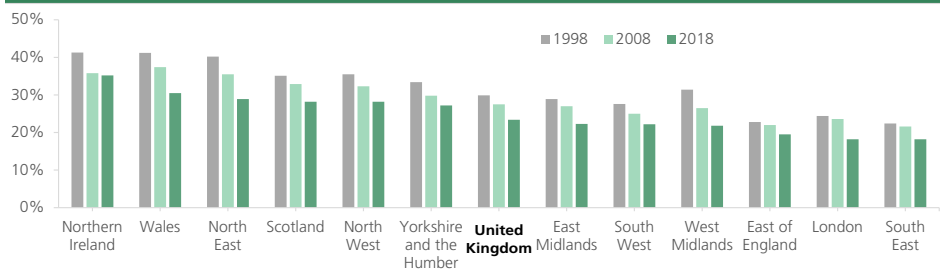
Figure 9c shows that whilst trade union membership fell in every region of the UK from 1998 to 2018, membership ranges from 35% of employees in Northern Ireland to 18% in London and South East England. 31% of Welsh employees are members of trade unions, and 28% of Scottish employees.

6e. % EMPLOYEES WHO ARE TRADE UNION MEMBERS



Source: [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018 \(2018\)](#)

6f % EMPLOYEES WHO ARE TRADE UNION MEMBERS, BY REGION



Source: [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018 \(2018\)](#)

6.3 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.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was founded in January 1958. CND membership is thought to have peaked in the early-mid 1980s: in

⁷² [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018 \(2018\), table 1-7-B.](#)

⁷³ [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018 \(2018\), table 1-8.](#)

⁷⁴ [BIS Trade Union Statistics 2018 \(2018\), table 3-1.](#)

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 BBC estimated that CND had 32,000 members in 2006.⁷⁵ In 2015, the *Guardian* reported the number of new members joining each month rose from 30 to 200 in the period, though gave no total estimate of membership.⁷⁶ CND's 2017 accounts reported a total income of around £649,566, of which subscriptions and regular giving accounted for around £329,000, an increase compared to £315,000 in 2015.⁷⁷

CND Cymru claimed 1,000 members across Wales in April 2018.⁷⁸

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 100 district groups.⁷⁹ The charity's website indicates that it has 40,000 members around England.⁸⁰ In 2018 around £1.46 million, or 36% of income, was from membership subscriptions.⁸¹

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 currently claims around 100,000 members (as of July 2019).⁸²

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.⁸³ As of July 2019, it had 81 local groups operating across Great Britain.⁸⁴ As of July 2014, it had around 40,000 people 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.⁸⁵ The *Guardian* estimated that: 'anything between 50,000 and 150,000 marched' on 16 April 2016.⁸⁶

⁷⁵ ['Whatever happened to CND?', BBC News](#), 5 July 2006.

⁷⁶ ['CND membership surge gathers pace after Jeremy Corbyn election', The Guardian](#), 16 October 2015.

⁷⁷ CND, ['Report and unaudited financial statements for year ended 31 December 2017': CND, 'Council Members' Report and Financial Statements for year ending 31/12/2016'](#).

⁷⁸ Benjamin Kaplan, ['The campaign for nuclear disarmament at 60: around the UK'](#), 29 April 2018.

⁷⁹ CPRE, ['Accounts and Trustees' Annual Report, 2018 \(2018\)](#), 19.

⁸⁰ CPRE website, ['How you can help section'](#), accessed 12 July 2019.

⁸¹ CPRE, ['Accounts and Trustees' Annual Report, 2018 \(2018\)](#), 13.

⁸² Countryside Alliance website, ['Homepage'](#), accessed 12 July 2019.

⁸³ ['People's March Against Austerity', The Guardian](#), 5 February 2013.

⁸⁴ The People's Assembly, ['Local People's Assembly Groups'](#), accessed 12 July 2019.

⁸⁵ BBC News, ['Thousands attend anti-austerity rallies across UK'](#) (20 June 2015).

⁸⁶ Frances Ryan, ['The People's Assembly march was a display of anger – that's how change starts'](#), *The Guardian*, 21 April 2016.

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).