

As August 2026, the House of Lords had 772 members. No one political party currently has a majority in the House of Lords, although the House of Lords should loosely mirror the composition of the House of Commons. Currently, there are 244 Conservative peers, 216 Labour peers, 75 Liberal Democrats and 13 peers from other minor political parties. The remaining are cross-benchers, independents or bishops. Reform UK have argued that they should have representatives in the House of Lords.

Aside from the Bishops, all of the remaining peers are life peers. This means that when they die, so does their title. Before Tony Blair and the 1999 House of Lords act, the majority of peers were hereditary peers who allowed their title to pass to their next of kin. This had essentially given the Conservatives an inbuilt advantage.

Many life peers are former high-profile politicians; typically, former party cabinet members or leaders. Examples include: Baroness May, Lord Cameron and Lord Gove. They provide experienced advice, based on their time in government, when scrutinising legislation and suggesting amendments.

Until July 2026, 92 hereditary peers also sat in the House of Lords. These positions - generally the biggest and grandest names and titles in the Lords were kept as part of a compromise with the Conservatives during Blair's reforms in 1999 until 2026. These were removed after the passage of the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Act (2026).

The Bishops represent the Church of England in Parliament. There are currently 26 of these Bishops. Their role is controversial, given the plurality of religions in Britain today, as well as the decline in church attendance. The Bishops have an influential role on issues of morality, such as debates over assisted dying, when legislation is passing through the Lords.

The lack of an overall majority is in part caused by the existence of cross-benchers. These are life peers who are nominated without any party allegiance. As of August 2026, there were 154 of them. They are independent and are in the Lords because of a skill or experience in a particular area of government policy-making. Existing life peers nominate the majority, and these can represent various cross-sections of society. They bring insight into the scrutiny of legislation. For example, many doctors, scientists, lawyers, financiers and public service chiefs can end up in the House of Lords. An independent committee approves them, the Appointments Committee.

Until 2009, the House of Lords was the highest court in the UK. Another New Labour reform was to remove the most senior members of the judicial system - the Law Lords - from their posts in the House of Lords and into the newly created Supreme Court. The aim was to separate the boundaries between the legislature and the judiciary. Even though the Law Lords no longer sit in the House of Lords, there are many judges (who do not have any judicial powers) who still influence policies. This enables the House of Lords to examine the legality of legislation closely.

After the removal of the hereditary peers, demographic totals are now 511 male members and 279 female members. The average age of eligible members is 70 years old, and 94% are white.

Until the majority abolition of hereditary peers in 1999, the House of Lords lacked professionalism. Many peers, simply members because of the family that they were born into, did not turn up to debates and were inherently conservative. Since 1999, with the domination of life peers, who generally contribute vast experience, the perception of the House of Lords has become more positive.

The House of Lords are more independently minded than MPs. Because they do not have to worry about elections once appointed and their lifetime right to be in the Lords, the whips have less impact on their decisions. Decisions are generally made out of principle or based on experience.

The Lords see their role of scrutiny as vital in the policy-making process. They take this role especially seriously when the government enjoys large majorities in the House of Commons, making opposition to the government weaker.

During the Coalition Government of 2010-2015, many argued that, as the executive had not been elected (it had been created as the result of a series of deals and compromises between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats), it saw its role as questioning some policies that had not received a mandate in the election.

The inclusion of the European Convention of Human Rights into UK law as part of the Human Rights Act has given the Lords a major role in the protection of human rights and civil liberties, both in their scrutiny of legislation and in raising awareness more generally.

The Lords cannot permanently block a piece of legislation. If it is approved by the House of Commons, the Lords can only delay it for a year under the 1949 Parliament Act. The government can use this legislation to get around the Lords. An example of this was in 1998 when the Labour-dominated House of Commons tried to equalise same sex consent and faced immense opposition in the Lords, who refused to support it. As such, the Parliament Act was used to make the Bill become law. The Parliament Act has been used four times.

The number of defeats that a government suffers in the House of Lords have varied per year since their reform in 1999. In 2024, the outgoing Conservative government had faced 43 defeats, much less than the 125 in the 2023 and the 72 in the 2025 sittings.

The House of Lords has not had the authority to amend or vote against a Budget in the House of Commons since the 1909 Budget, which led to the limitation of the Lords' power in the 1911 Parliament Act. Moreover, it is a convention that the House of Lords will not block legislation that was explicitly in the manifesto of a governing party. This is known as the Salisbury Convention.