



Lords of our Manor?

How a reformed House of Lords
can better represent the UK

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New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

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Published by NLGN

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
1 Introduction	5
2 How representative is the current House of Lords?	9
3 Breakdown by Party	17
4 How a reformed House of Lords would look	18
5 Conclusions	21

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend special thanks to Sam Mohun and Max Xie, whose extensive and outstanding research helped to inform much of this paper. We would also like to thank Chris Leslie for his intellectual input and Vivek Bhardwaj for his technological wizardry.

1 *Introduction*

Despite over a century of debate, the UK Parliament remains a fundamentally imbalanced institution with an outdated second chamber, disconnected from the country at large. The laws we live under are still determined in an unrepresentative and unfair way. There remains a glaring built-in bias in the composition of the House of Lords, with some parts of the United Kingdom under-represented to the point of neglect. If legislation is to be seen as legitimate in every locality, then it stands to reason that everyone should have access to roughly the same number of legislators.

In this paper we illustrate the disproportionate representation of London and the South East in our legislature and the unfairly diminished voice that many parts of England have in the second chamber at present. Local communities should have a fair share of influence within our legislature and this is a cornerstone principle which has been overlooked for too long.

The 1999 reforms to remove the majority of hereditary Peers is rightly seen as a major accomplishment in making the House of Lords more legitimate and will no doubt be remembered in history as one of the great reforming constitutional acts in British history. However, further reform since then has been less emphatic. Consultations, commissions, Green Papers, Government Bills and numerous debates have littered the reform process and the debacle of the 2003 Commons votes, where all options for Lords reform were defeated, seemed to exhaust any appetite for change. This sense of inertia has not abated with the recently published Lords White Paper making clear that changes to the structure of the House will not occur during the lifetime of the current Parliament – there is yet again a further period of consultation.

There may be some reasons to be optimistic; during the 2007 free vote on Lords reform, all the main political parties demonstrated a general consensus that the second chamber should be either 80 or 100 per cent elected. As a next step we urge the Government to grab the mantle of this decision and push forward with purpose to create a House of Lords that is representative of the UK as a whole.

The status-quo is no longer a feasible option. With nearly a quarter of Lords living in London and yet other parts of England not even mustering half the Peers they might expect given their population size, there is an overwhelming case for change.

A House of Lords for the whole of the UK

The UK state remains one of the most over-centralised in the world, with most decision making and tax-raising powers retained by central Government. In this paper we argue that as part of a greater drive towards decentralisation, a reformed House of Lords should more accurately represent the diversity of the British regions.

Our paper argues that a reformed House of Lords should be based on fair representation for all regions in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Our research identifies that most of the English regions as well as Northern Ireland and Wales are currently under-represented in the Lords whilst the majority of Peers live disproportionately in London and the south of England.

To achieve greater regional parity we propose a 'regional list' system of elections for either 80% or 100% of the House, with seats allocated on the basis of each region's population. We also argue that this could go some way to alleviating the perceived power imbalance between the English regions and Scotland and Wales.

The Lords as it stands

Following the House of Lords Act 1999, the traditional Conservative stronghold of the Lords has gradually receded. With 215 Peers, Labour is now the largest party within the Chamber, with Crossbenchers taking 203 seats, Conservatives 202 and Liberal Democrats 76. A further 13 non-affiliated Peers and 26 Bishops bring together a total of 735 members of the House of Lords, compared with 646 Members of Parliament. See Figure 1:¹

¹ http://www.parliament.uk/directories/house_of_lords_information_office/analysis_by_composition.cfm

Figure 1 Peers by Party Strength
 NB Excludes 11 Peers who are on leave of absence.

Party	Life Peers	Hereditary:	Hereditary:	Hereditary:	Bishops	Total
		Elected by Party	Elected Office Holders	Royal Office Holder		
Conservative	154	39	9	0	0	202
Labour	211	2	2	0	0	215
Liberal Democrat	71	3	2	0	0	76
Crossbench	170	29	2	2	0	203
Bishops	0	0	0	0	26	26
Other	11	2	0	0	0	13
TOTAL	617	75	15	2	26	735

The proposals set out in the 2008 Lords Reform White Paper call for:

- Either a 100 or 80 per cent elected chamber
- Options for direct elections: first-past-the-post, alternative vote, single transferable vote and a list system
- The primacy of the House of Commons to remain in any reform process and the reformed second chamber not to rival or replicate the Commons
- Proposals on eligibility and disqualification, including recall ballots for elected members of the second chamber and similar arrangements for appointed members
- Members to normally serve a single non-renewable term of 12 to 15 years
- The link between the Peerage and a seat in Parliament will be broken altogether
- The size of the second chamber to be significantly reduced and to be smaller than the House of Commons, with costs maintained or reduced.
- Proposals to establish a new independent Statutory Appointments Commission, if there is an appointed element in the second chamber.

On balance the thrust of the 2008 paper is sensible, although we feel that new initiatives such as recall ballots and fixed terms are unnecessary and may put some people off from standing for office. At the very least, should

these proposals be enacted then it would seem incongruous if they did not also similarly apply to the House of Commons. Moreover, it is regrettable that the White Paper offers limited direction on how to make the Lords more representative of British citizens. There was insufficient mention in the White Paper of the regional imbalance in the current House of Lords membership. In our view, it is vital to uphold the primacy of the House of Commons and a House of Lords elected on a regional list system would effectively support the scrutiny of legislation and more accurately facilitate the views of citizens around the country.

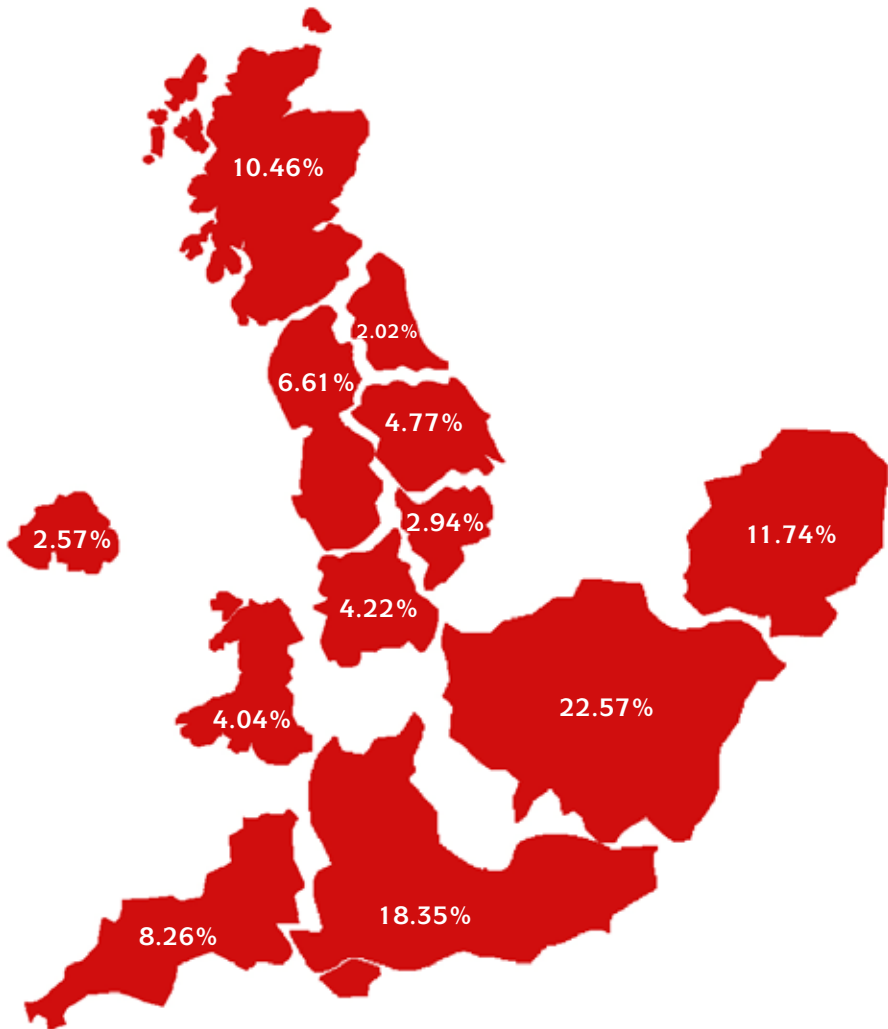
2 *How representative is the current House of Lords?*

Using information from the publically available House of Lords Register of Members' Expenses², we have assessed the geographic make-up of members of the House of Lords by analysing the main residency of Peers. We accept that residing in an area might not mean that a Peer was born or has always resided in that area. However, given that Peers have identified and therefore self-defined the area as their 'main residence', we feel it is fair to categorise these areas as the primary locations in which the individual member of the House of Lords are based.

We had initially hoped to analyse the first half of the postcode of each Peer's address in order to undertake a comprehensive and more detailed analysis of where Peers reside. However, this information is not in the public domain and the request we made to get this information was declined by the Freedom of Information Officer at the House of Lords, on the basis that "it constitutes personal data of which you are not the data subject". We have appealed this decision on the basis that the information required would not expose the actual address of each Peer, but merely the geographical area of their residence.

The figures in this report are therefore based on Peers who listed their main residence in the House of Lords Register of Members' Expenses which was published in March 2007, minus those that have left the House since then. Of these 545 Peers there is a striking bias towards residence in the South of England.

2 http://www.parliament.uk/about_lords/holallowances/hol_expenses04.cfm

Figure 2 Graphical illustration of how Peers are distributed across the UK³

³ The percentages on this map do not add up to 100% because some Lords registered their main residence as overseas.

Figure 3 The percentage of Peers in each region contrasted with the percentage of the UK population in each region.

Region or country	Number of Peers	Percentage of Peers	Population of region or country	Percentage of UK population
East Midlands	16	2.94%	4,364,200	7.40%
East of England	64	11.74%	5,606,600	9.40%
London	123	22.57%	7,512,400	12.20%
North East	11	2.02%	2,555,700	4.30%
North West	36	6.61%	6,853,200	11.30%
Northern Ireland	14	2.57%	1,742,000	2.90%
Overseas	8	1.47%	N/A	N/A
Scotland	57	10.46%	5,116,900	8.50%
South East	100	18.35%	8,237,800	13.50%
South West	45	8.26%	5,124,100	8.40%
Wales	22	4.04%	2,965,900	4.90%
West Midlands	23	4.22%	5,366,700	8.80%
Yorkshire and the Humber	26	4.77%	5,142,400	8.40%
Total	545	100%	60,587,900	100.00%

Figure 4 Representation scores of regions

(A score of 1 indicates representation in proportion to population. A score of two would mean the area has twice the representation its population demands, 0.5 would mean an area has half the representation its population demands)



More detailed data, which we would have gained had the Freedom of Information request been granted by the House of Lords, would allow have allowed us to undertake a more detailed analysis. However, the information we have does allow a degree of analysis at a sub-regional level.

Outside London the next two most popular areas for Peers are Oxfordshire (including Oxford) with 22 Peers (4% of Peers) and Hampshire (including Southampton) with 16 Peers (3% of Peers). Counties in the South of England, such as Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Somerset, Norfolk and Surrey are also among the most popular places for Peers to live.

East Midlands

Despite making up over 7% of the UK population, our survey found that less than 3% of Peers reside within this region. Leicestershire is fairly well represented by six Peers, followed by Derbyshire with three Peers and Nottinghamshire with only one Peer. The East Midlands is the worst represented of all the regions, with less than half the Peers that it should have given the size of its population.

East of England

The presence of Hertfordshire (fourteen Peers), Cambridgeshire (fourteen), Norfolk (thirteen), Essex (ten), Suffolk (ten), and Bedfordshire (four) help considerably to ensure a wide representation for the region in the Lords. The East of England is over-represented with 22% more Peers that it should have given the size of the region's population.

London

London is hugely over-represented within the House of Lords, with its 123 Peers comprising over one fifth of all members, with almost twice the number of Peers it should have given the population of London.

North East

Our research found that the North East is one of the most under-represented areas in the UK, with only eleven Peers (including the Bishop of Durham) naming their primary residence in the region. Only two Peers are based in the vast Tyneside sub-region, whilst only two come from Durham. Northumberland fares better with six Peers. The North East has less than half the number of Peers it should have given the size of population.

North West

Across the Pennines, the North West performs comparatively well. However, there is clear bias towards more affluent counties such as Cheshire and areas such as Merseyside and Greater Manchester. Despite representing two of Britain's major cities in Liverpool and Manchester, these areas are only represented by two and five Peers respectively. Cumbria (ten Peers) and Cheshire (nine) are better represented. The North West has only just over half the number of Peers it should have given the size of the region's population.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's counties are represented by fourteen Peers, just over 10% fewer than the number it should have given the size of its population.

Scotland

The twelve Peers hailing from Edinburgh help to boost Scotland's representation in the House, however Glasgow's six representatives demonstrates an imbalance between the two major Scottish cities. Elsewhere, Aberdeenshire has five Peers, followed by Fife, Angus and the Scottish Borders, all of whom have four. Whilst there is clearly variation in the representation of different areas in Scotland, overall Scotland is over-represented with 23% more Peers than it should have given the size of population.

South East

The region is highly over-represented in the Lords, with 100 of the 546 surveyed Peers residing in the region. The South East comes second only to London in having a disproportionately high number of Peers with 36% more Peers than it should have given the size of population.

South West

As one of the most diverse political regions, the South-West achieves largely fair representation in the Lords. Somerset is top with thirteen Peers, followed by Gloucestershire with ten. Cornwall, an area often associated with being overlooked by national Government, only has four. The South West is the region closest to having the representation in the House of Lords that it should have given the size of population and is only very marginally under-represented.

Wales

In Wales many counties only register one or two Peers, however Powys is represented by seven. Overall Wales is under-represented with just under 20% fewer Peers than it should have given the size of the population.

West Midlands

Only one member of the House of Lords lists their primary address in Birmingham, the UK's second city, whilst the county of Warwickshire registers six in total. It is one of the worst represented regions in the UK, with around half the Peers it should have given the region's population.

Yorkshire and The Humber

Representation in the region is slightly worse than the North West. Ten Peers registered their primary address in North Yorkshire and seven in West Yorkshire. Yorkshire and The Humber has just over half the number of Peers it should have given the size of population.

The conclusions of our research are therefore stark. In its present form, the House of Lords embodies a real and substantial gap in regional accountability and representation. The information we have suggests that many major British cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Bristol and Belfast have little or no voice within the Lords. A significant north/south divide is apparent, with areas in the South enjoying far greater representation than those in the North. London has more Peers than the East Midlands, West Midlands, Wales, Northern Ireland, North East England and Yorkshire and the Humber put together. London aside, there also seems to be an incoherent bias towards lesser-populated rural areas then heavily-populated urban ones.

It could be argued by some that there is a certain inevitability given the location of the Westminster location of the House of Lords that many Peers will be based around London and the South East. If more Peers were based in areas further away from the Capital, might they find it more difficult to attend the Chamber and take part in debates and votes? Why, indeed, would a Peer living in the North East travel hundreds of miles to attend one particular debate?

NLGN decided that this issue was also worth exploring. Our research into attendance⁴ conclusively dispels the notion that in order to be an active

⁴ Attendance is measured by voting or telling in divisions. The attendance data we used was from the website www.publicwhip.org.uk.

member of the House of Lords Peers need to live nearby to the London postcode of SW1. Remarkably, Peers based in London and the South East are some of the least likely members to attend the House of Lords whereas those living in the West Midlands, Wales and the North West are far more likely to take part in the business of the House, despite the considerable distances that they have to travel to get to London. Astoundingly, even Peers who register their main address as “Overseas” are more likely to attend the Lords than those living in London and the South East.

The average attendance for each surveyed member of the Lords is 37.79%. This is higher than the average for members living in London (32.71%) and those living in the South East (36.17%). Conversely, Peers from the West Midlands recorded an overall attendance average of 50.20%, whilst their colleagues in Wales achieved a relatively respectable 49.37%.

Figure 5 Regional breakdown of location of Peers and attendance record

Region or country	Average attendance (mean)	Number of Peers	Percentage of Peers
West Midlands	50.20%	23	4.22%
Wales	49.37%	22	4.04%
North West England	47.14%	36	6.61%
Yorkshire and the Humber	41.46%	26	4.77%
South West England	38.74%	45	8.26%
East of England	38.54%	64	11.74%
Scotland	36.79%	57	10.46%
East Midlands	36.25%	16	2.94%
South East England	36.17%	100	18.35%
North East England	34.86%	11	2.02%
Overseas	33.38%	8	1.47%
London	32.71%	123	22.57%
Northern Ireland	22.73%	14	2.57%
Total	37.79%	545	100%

3 *Breakdown by party*

Interestingly, when the residence of Peers and party affiliation are contrasted, the results generally replicate the geographical support of the House of Commons. Most Labour Peers came from London (thirty-seven), again reflecting the Capital's dominance of the House, with other strong support coming from typically Labour areas such as Scotland (12% of Labour Peers) and the North West (12%). However, despite Labour's dominance of the North East in terms of House of Commons seats, only 3% of Labour Peers actually live there.

The majority of Conservative Party Peers are taken from their traditional strongholds in the south with 24% of its Peers from the South East, 20% of its Peers from London, 17% of its Peers from the East of England and 12% of its Peers from the South West. Only one Conservative Peer resides in the North East, making up less than 1% of Conservatives representation in the Lords, and only two Conservative Peers reside in Wales, making up less than 2% of the Conservative's representation in the Lords.

A large percentage of Liberal Democrat Peers also come from the South. 28% of Liberal Democrat Peers live in London, the highest percentage of all the political Parties, and they are particularly prevalent in the South East (17%) and the South West (12%). Liberal Democrat representation is lower in other regions and particularly low in the Midlands, with only one Peer residing in the East Midlands and one Peer residing in the East Midlands (the two regions combined only make up 3% of Liberal Democrat representation in the Lords).

Crossbencher Peers also show a prominent bias towards the South, with 26% of Crossbenchers residing in London, 18% in the South East, 12% in the East of England and 10% in the South West. Only one Crossbencher hails from the East Midlands (1% of Crossbenchers), whilst two come from the North East (2% of Crossbenchers).

4 *How a reformed House of Lords would look*

The New Local Government Network is agnostic about the precise nature of a reformed House of Lords, as long as there is a more representative basis to its composition than at present, with a fair number of seats for each region of the country. Given the direction set out in the Government's recent White Paper, the structure of the new House of Lords could be based on 400 senators as advocated in the 2008 Lords White Paper.

It might be appropriate to opt for a regional list system based on the d'Hondt voting system for European Parliament, with seats allocated on the basis of each region's population. However, it might also be an option to compose the chamber through more indirectly elected means – via nomination from locally elected or regionally elected bodies such as local authority regional bodies or the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. We recognise there are important issues in preserving the supremacy of the House of Commons that a separately elected second chamber may impinge upon. This is not the core point we seek to press in this short report. We believe that whatever the final basis for selecting second chamber membership, it is vital that fair regional representation is at the heart of the solution.

There are other interesting developments that would be possible should a newly constituted second chamber be created. We would suggest that political parties embrace the idea of regional primaries to pick who should be on each party's list, allowing local people, many of whom would not be members of the respective political party, to have an input on which candidates are selected. The primary system has seldom been used in the UK, although the Conservative Party have experimented with the system for Parliamentary and Mayoral selections. In particular the open primary for their London Mayoral candidate was widely seen as having engaged and involved non-party members in their selection process.

We also urge parties to be mindful of the disadvantages of a closed party list systems where voters simply vote for the party and they have no say as to which candidates are elected. Instead they should offer an open list of candidates for electors to choose from, all of whom carry equal chance of being elected.

The population of the United Kingdom is an estimated 60,587,700. Based on a population breakdown, the House of Lords would be constituted on the following basis:

Figure 6 How the 400 House of Lords seats advocated in the Lords White Paper would be distributed to best reflect the regions

Region or country	Estimated population mid-2006	Percentage of UK population	Number of allocated seats in reformed House of Lords (100% elected)	Number of allocated seats in reformed House of Lords (80% elected)
Wales	2,965,900	4.9%	20	16
Scotland	5,116,900	8.5%	34	27
Northern Ireland	1,742,000	2.9%	12	9
East	5,606,600	9.4%	37	30
London	7,512,400	12.2%	49	39
East Midlands	4,364,200	7.4%	30	24
West Midland	5,366,700	8.8%	35	28
North East	2,555,700	4.3%	17	14
North West	6,853,200	11.3%	45	36
South East	8,237,800	13.5%	54	43
South West	5,124,100	8.4%	33	27
Yorkshire & The Humber	5,142,400	8.4%	34	27
Total			400	320

A solution to ‘the English question’?

Creating a regional dimension to a reformed House of Lords is not a particularly new idea. Indeed, one of the options identified by Lord Wakeham in his Royal Commission on Lords Reform was to have 87 regional members directly elected in thirds every five years, an idea subsequently rejected by the Government.

However, since the first changes to the structure of the Lords, there has been a growing concern among those who feel that whilst the Scottish, Welsh and the Northern Irish have seen power devolved, the English regions have

not benefited from similar decentralisation. Few feasible options to remedy this issue are on the table. Elected Regional Assemblies are highly unlikely to be introduced given the forceful rejection of them in the North East. The Conservatives have toyed with an English Grand Committee in Parliament, although this would do little to assuage power away from central government to the regions.

A reformed regional Second Chamber however has the potential to complete what Malcolm Rifkind terms “the unfinished business of devolution”. By giving regions a proportionate say in how legislation is shaped, it would breathe new life into local politics and politicians.

5 *Conclusion*

The House of Lords was famously described by Tony Benn as “the British Outer Mongolia for retired politicians”.⁵ Our research has shown that, while Peers might not come from quite as far afield as that, it shows a disturbing bias towards some areas of the country.

We believe that a reformed House of Lords which reflected a better balance of regional experience and representation would allow better scrutiny of our legislative process. With an intake currently out of sync with the rest of Britain, the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the Second Chamber must be called into question.

In an already over-centralised and Westminster-centric political environment, the Second Chamber should be an emblem for political thought and debate from throughout the United Kingdom. The current political environment is one in which Members of Parliament spend most of the working week in London and the majority of people running non-departmental public bodies are from London and the South East.⁶ A genuinely representative Second Chamber would act as a bulwark against the metropolitan dominance of the legislative process by a London-centric view of the world.

We hope that the main political parties will use the recent Lord White Paper to examine our proposals in detail and recognise the urge case for early reform.

⁵ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/the_house_of_lords_is_the_british_outer_mongolia/263550.html

⁶ Leslie and Dallison (2008), *You've been Quango'd! Mapping power across the regions*, London: NLGN

Despite over a century of debate, the UK Parliament remains a fundamentally imbalanced institution with an outdated second chamber, disconnected from the country at large. The laws we live under are still determined in an unrepresentative and unfair way.

There remains a glaring built-in bias in the composition of the House of Lords, with some parts of the United Kingdom under-represented to the point of neglect. If legislation is to be seen as legitimate in every locality, then it stands to reason that everyone should have access to roughly the same number of legislators.

In this paper we illustrate the disproportionate representation of London and the South East in our legislature and the unfairly diminished voice that many parts of England have in the second chamber at present. Local communities should have a fair share of influence within our legislature and this is a cornerstone principle which has been overlooked for too long.