How representative is the House of Commons?

The 2020 Commons is claimed to be ‘the most diverse on record’. But is it truly representative?

### Theories of representation

**Delegate model:** representatives should not deviate from the clear instructions of their constituents.

**Trustee model:** according to Edmund Burke (1729–97), representatives should use their judgement in representing their constituents.

**Descriptive representation:** the representative assembly should be a ‘microcosm’ of the society that it represents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats (change)</th>
<th>2019 vote share (%)</th>
<th>Share change</th>
<th>2019 votes</th>
<th>Vote change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>48 (+13)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>+8.1</td>
<td>1,242,380</td>
<td>+246,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>6 (–7)</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>–3.5</td>
<td>692,939</td>
<td>–65,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrats</td>
<td>4 (=)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>+2.8</td>
<td>263,417</td>
<td>+84,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>1 (–6)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>–8.5</td>
<td>511,838</td>
<td>–205,169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1** What happened in Scotland?

![Figure 1](image1.png)

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**Figure 2** Female MPs by political party

![Figure 2](image2.png)

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**Figure 3** Party seats and vote share after the 2019 general election

![Figure 3](image3.png)

**ACTIVITY**

Research, make notes and discuss the following:

1. How closely does the House of Commons reflect how voters cast their votes? Does it matter?
2. Explain the votes-to-seats translation in Scotland. What conclusions can be drawn about the first-past-the-post voting system?
3. Evaluate the statement that the 2020 Commons is ‘the most diverse on record’.

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**Figure 4** Number of MPs from minority ethnic backgrounds. Numbers in brackets show increase from 2017 to 2019

![Figure 4](image4.png)

**Figure 5** Age of MPs at the 2019 general election. Note that the ages of 18 MPs are not available in the public sphere

![Figure 5](image5.png)

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