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# If we want to take back our democracy, let's have a look at the House of Lords

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Imagine a body that meets to help decide laws that has no elected members. It consists of people that have been judged to be of an appropriate standing and the children of previous members (who elect one another amongst themselves) as well as some long-serving bishops. That, in a nutshell, is the House of Lords.





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In 1911 and the 1940s, legislation was changed to tip the balance of power in favour of those elected to sit in on the green benches of the lower house.

Those sitting on red benches, cannot stop legislation, only delay it. They cannot force amendments which the Commons doesn't want and cannot delay a bill for more than two parliamentary sessions or one year.

It's vital to have an upper chamber, in my view.

This prevents complacency in the lower chamber and keeps the chance of majoritism at a low. In the same way that a credible opposition does.

But the House of the Lords isn't really fit for purpose. The way in which hereditary peers selected, though losing their influence is a flashback to a more autocratic era. 26 Church



England bishops are in play, but more than half of Britain is no longer describing itself as [religious](#).

Now, I'm someone, who doesn't often discuss my religious views, because they're quite complicated and confused. But what I do believe is that whilst religion has a positive role to play in society and individual lives, it shouldn't play a role in government.

The proverbial really hits the fan when that happens.



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (pictured above) was a staunch secularist despite being a strong, religious man. By founding the Republic of Turkey as a secular, democratic state, he moved it on from the corrupt "sick man of Europe" days of the old Ottoman Empire.

Turkey grew and the current President is trying to undo his vision, look at how that's going.

To be truly democratic, I think you must be secular, how can everyone be equal under the eyes of the law, if one religious group constitutionally (albeit un-written) has more influence than another?

Members of the Lords are entitled of up to £300 per day, plus travel expenses and subsidised costs in restaurants. They can opt out and get a measly £150 instead.

[Attending the Lords can mean as little as walking into the Palace of Westminster and walking straight back out after you've been seen by others.](#)

There are over 800 members (798+27 on a leave of absence or disqualified) too, only China's People's Congress is a large government chamber, it's worth mentioning the Chinese state has a population of around 1,200,000,000.

All these Lords are claiming taxpayer's money on expenses.

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Reform would involve a more streamlined number, a smaller house would cost far less and could help remove members not that interested in turning up. All members would have to turn up and contribute.



Which they would also be more inclined to do if the chamber was more democratically elected.

Currently, there is no proportion.

Despite receiving around 80% of the votes at the last general election, the Tories and Labour have only just over half of the seats in the Lords combined with 452 of the 798 current members. The Liberal Democrats who have performed atrociously in the last two general elections and look a million miles away from even their zenith under Kennedy are on 100 seats.



There are several different ways that an alternative Lords might like.

One might argue it should be done based on proportional representation of General Elections. But there can be massive swings in opinion in between elections. Also, proportional representation isn't an idea that I buy.

It certainly shouldn't be used for the Commons, it creates weak governments and forces parties into coalitions of chaos - remember that term?

They will more than likely be a reality rather than hyperbole under PR in the Commons.

Having it in one chamber and not the other can lead to arguments that it should be used in both and then we need to look at the reality of an exactly proportional Lords.

UKIP would've gained 13 seats in 2015 if the Lords was capped to 100 members. This more than the Lib Dem's with 8 and SNP with 5. First Past the Post can often cut out fringe parties and only give them power when a significantly spread number of the electorate want them to.

If everyone in London wanted UKIP to gain power for example, that would be 73 seats in the Parliament. If no-one else did, then that wouldn't be enough to form a government, perhaps in this extreme scenario it may be enough to be a junior coalition in power, but as much of that 73 would be Labour seats, I suspect the Tories could hold onto power.

Now, proportionally as a size of the electorate, those London votes alone would account 14 seats in a 100 seat Lords, and presumably, a significant percentage would come from outside of London, giving UKIP a higher figure. FPTP helps prevent certain parts of the





country having too much influence, although I would admit in Scotland there's a demographic deficit due to the size of constituencies.

An FPTP Lords would be little more than an extension of the Commons.

Thus, the third way would be similar to the Welsh Assembly.



In this system, there will be constituencies who can elect members, these constituencies would be larger and be under a first past the post system.

Then you "top it up" - using PR - half elected by FPTP and the other by PR - creating a balance where perhaps the most popular party is a slightly better position, but a lot more compromise is necessary and fringe/extremist groups are kept in check.

And if there's one thing you need in upper chambers - it's compromise. You need it in all aspects of politics, but here is the one place more than others it is non-negotiable. Upper chambers exist to ensure there's moderation and compromise.

That is just one solution, and I'm sure over the coming years, more and more solutions will be put forward. But one thing is certain - the House of Lords is far from democracy and any reform to make it more democratic would be welcome.

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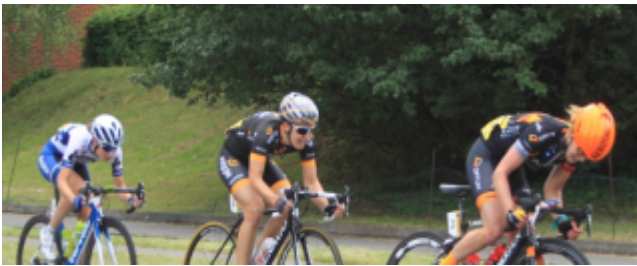
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