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Democratic Deficits in British Politics: First Past the Post and the House of Lords

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Abstract

Progressive political reforms are a constant process in every democratic nation. Britain has been reforming its political system into a more democratic one since the beginning of the twentieth century. Britain enjoys a representative democracy as a pillar of its political system. Representative democracy is a political process whereby people “freely” choose their representatives to enact the policies they believe in. One of the components of this mechanism is the free and fair electoral system by which people voice their choice of representatives. In Britain, First Past the Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used to elect Members of Parliament (MP) to the House of Commons. Though FPTP is considered as a simple plurality system, it still creates discrepancies that contradict the principles of representative democracy. This article traces some of the controversies that surround First Past the Post and causes it to be a deficit in the British political system. Furthermore, democratic reforms are still confronted by long lasting political traditions. Indeed, Britain still maintains a culturally rooted tradition manifested through the House of Lords. This article discusses the position of the House of Lords, an unelected chamber in British parliament in the twenty-first century, in order to situate it within the framework of representative democracy

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the Constitutional Monarchy, Britain has slowly been reforming its political system into a more democratic and more legitimate one. Unlike many of its neighbors in Europe, Britain went through a slow “evolution” rather than a radical revolution. In order to critically assess the development of British democracy, it is necessary to first categorize and define the particular concept of democracy that Britain enjoys. The substantiation of the Constitutional Settlement in 1689 ensured the transfer of power from monarch to parliament. This fresh step initiated the concept of *representative democracy* in Britain. *Representative democracy* is when “acts of government are usually performed not directly by citizens but indirectly by representatives whom they elect on a free and equal basis” (Judge, 1999, p. 07). Decision making is, therefore, not in the hands of the people through direct participation. Rather, it becomes in the trust of few “decision makers” who represent the collectivity of citizens. To that end, *representative democracy* is considered by several critics, including Joseph Schumpeter, as a rule of politicians instead of “rule of the people” (as cited in Judge, 1999, p. 05). Schumpeter explains that democracy, in these terms, becomes a competitive race between politicians, and although these leaders are held accountable, the participation of the people is severely limited. Jean-Jacques *Rousseau had*

previously criticized representative democracy for its limitation on people's freedom. In *The Social Contract*, he argued that people are "free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing" (Rousseau, 1762, p. 74). Although far from the practices of slavery, *representative democracy* does entail "practical exclusion" of people from direct policy management.

Progressive reforms are a constant process in every democratic nation. Britain has been on the road of intense reforms since the beginning of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, as politics became increasingly tangled with the age of pluralism, the proceedings of these reforms became less satisfying to the British people. This article considers two contemporary issues that are steaming current political debates; *First Past the Post* and the House of Lords. To put these issues into the right perspective, several questions should be asked to which this article shall attempt to find answers. First, does the British electoral system represent a major deficit in its democracy? And if so, how does *First Past the Post* contradict the concept of *representative democracy* in Britain? Moreover, how can we make sense of the House of Lords, an unelected chamber in British parliament, in the twenty-first century? Finally, does the second chamber really fit within the framework of a *representative democracy*? Indeed, as the 20th century came to an end, it became clear that some democratic deficits were recognizable in British politics. A democratic deficit is a term used to describe the various ways in which democratic institutions may fail to function properly due to lack of transparency and accountability, or simply due to inadequate participation of citizens in policy making, whether voluntarily or involuntarily.

2. *First Past the Post*

Representative democracy legitimizes the executive power in a complex and large demography. In defense of *representative democracy*, Paul Hirst insists that the concept democracy is "a set of political mechanisms" (as cited in Judge, 1999, p. 09) instead of a mythical ideal of the rule of the people. *Representative democracy* is a political process whereby people "freely" choose their representatives to enact the policies they believe in. One of the components of this mechanism is the free and fair electoral system by which people voice their choice of representatives. The electoral system is an important instrument of *representative democracy*. When tracing how the electoral system legitimized the British representative government through history, David Judge concludes that democracy has come late in Britain (Judge, 1999, p. 14). Indeed, the democratic development went through different changes. The Corrupt Practices Act 1854 outlawed illegal electoral practices, including bribery and intimidation. Moreover, the Ballot Act 1872 introduced secret ballot and insured a more democratic voting system. More importantly, a series of reform acts ensured a legitimate representation for all British citizens only by the end of the First World War with the enactment of the Representation of the People Act 1918.

First Past the Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used to elect Members of Parliament (MP) to the House of Commons. FPTP is a *simple plurality* electoral system in which the winning candidate only needs a plurality of votes, i.e. one vote more than their leading opponent in order to win their seat. If one party is able to win at least 50% of the seats in the House of Commons (326 out of a total 650) then its leader becomes de facto Prime Minister and forms his or her government. *First Past the Post* is considered more or less a simple method of voting, where each political party selects one candidate to stand on their behalf, alongside independent candidates. Hence, the counting and the announcement of the result take no more than one day which ensures the smooth transfer of power from one party to another. *First Past the Post* is also praised most of the time for its outcome of a stable and unambiguous single party government. More importantly, as there is only one Member of Parliament per constituency, constituents know who to hold accountable for their representation in the House of Commons. The most common praise *First Past the Post*

generates is that the power of influencing the results of the ballot box is in the hands of the people, not the politicians.

The British electoral system is usually viewed as unfair by academics, politicians and even British citizens. When FPTP became the dominant electoral system in the 19th century, the shape of the House of Commons was more suitable for a simple plurality system as there were only two parties to vote for and limited voter demographics. However, the 20th century witnessed the rise of new political parties, all competing for the power of governing. Newborn political parties and political alliances such as the Social Democratic Party, then Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance, then Liberal Democrats, began to raise criticism about FPTP in the 1980s and call for reforms. Disapproval piled as they were obtaining fair shares of votes but fewer seats in the Commons.* Since then, many politicians have protested over the years, and denounced *First Past the Post* as “grotesquely unfair” (Blau, 2004, p. 166). Charges of unfairness increase when election time is close and details of British elections are released.

It is important to mention that these fallacies are often interrelated. In other words, each issue could be the underlying cause of another one, creating by this a chain of unfortunate gaps within the British electoral system. *First Past the Post* is criticized for several reasons. Nonetheless, as the purpose of this article is to demonstrate the fallacies of FPTP that contradict with the theoretical background of a *representative democracy*, the following three issues are selected as the main controversies that represent a deficit in Britain’s electoral system.

2.1. Winner Takes All

The electoral system in any *representative democracy* should be *free* and *fair*. Voting should be *free* from harassment, intimidation and bribery. Although there are many ways that define the concept of *fairness*, the most distinctive definition is the equity and value of all the votes. In other words, all of the citizens’ votes should count the same in value and influence. Vernon Bogdanor opened his *The Crisis of the Constitution* by stating:

Who governs Britain? That is the question being put to the voters on 7th May. But there are other questions lurking in the background, constitutional questions. The first of them is – how is Britain to be governed in an era of party fragmentation in which the electoral system either fails to yield a single-party majority government; or, if it does yield such a government, that government is one that enjoys little more than just over one-third of the popular vote (Bogdanor, 2015, p.06).

The last part of Bogdanor’s inquiry hints at a fallacy within the British electoral system that directly contradicts the essence of *representative democracy*. *First Past the Post* is by definition a *simple plurality* electoral system. Thus, the winning candidate *does not* need to achieve a majority of votes (50%+1) in their constituency; they only need more than anyone else in the competition. As a result, candidates in different constituencies could win with very low percentage. To stress Bogdanor’s point, a representative government could be constituted by winning, as in most recent elections, only one-third of the popular vote. To illustrate further, Figure 1 represents the 2015 general elections in the UK.

*In 1983 the Liberal-SDP Alliance won 25.4 percent of the vote but only 3.5 percent of the seats. In 1987 the Alliance won 22.6 percent but only 3.4 percent of the seats.

UK vote share after 650 of 650 seats

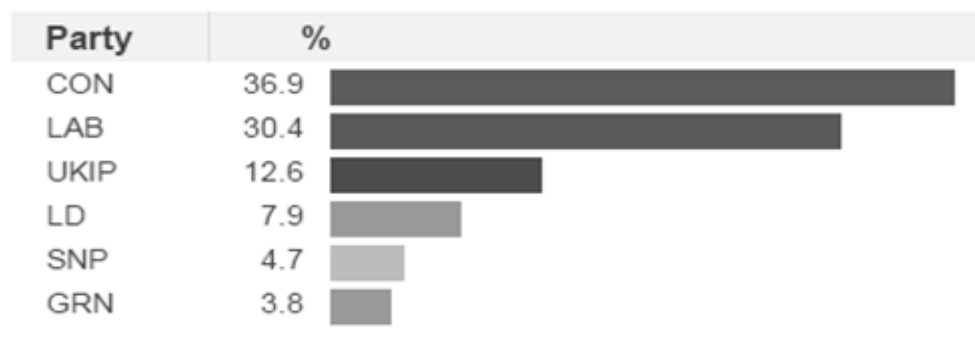


Figure 1. Copyright 2015 by British Broadcasting Company

The chart indicates that the Conservative Party obtained 36.9% of the votes, winning 331 seats, a majority of 12 seats. More importantly, it shows that the combination of the remaining 59.4% of the overall voters did not actually vote Conservative. Similarly, Table 1 presents the results of British elections in the last 25 years.

Table 1: British Elections Since 1992

Election year	Party	Seats	Vote%
1992	Conservative Party	336	41.9%
1997	Labour Party	418	43.2%
2001	Labour Party	412	40.7%
2005	Labour Party	355	35.2%
2010	Conservative Party	306	36.1%
2015	Conservative Party	331	36.9%

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As the table indicates, British governments have been formed with less than 50% share of the overall votes. In this system where minority (less than 50%) rules, the remaining share of votes are referred to as *wasted votes*.

FPTP has always been defended on its outcome of a stable single party government. As the twentieth century came to an end, this defense became insignificant to modern British politics. When a party fails to secure a majority of seats, it is rather difficult for it to govern; this is known as a *hung parliament*. Although no such scenario has occurred in the House of Commons yet, the passing of bills in a *hung parliament* could constantly fail as the shadow government's blockage becomes very strong. The political party is very vulnerable of being voted out at any time. In this case, the Prime Minister could seek the help of another party to secure a coalition government, or he could rely on a confidence-and-supply deal with smaller parties to gain support on budget and confidence votes.

There were a number of times in Britain's history when no party had a majority of Members of Parliament. For instance, in 1923 the Conservative party, under Stanley Baldwin, failed at winning the majority of seats and was unable to form a coalition. The Labour party under Ramsay MacDonald then took office and governed as a minority administration until October 1924. In 1974, the Conservative administration lost its majority. Edward Heath remained as Prime Minister for a few days while he tried to form a coalition. In less than a

week, Heath resigned having failed to put together a coalition. A more recent example would be the 2010 general elections when David Cameron was 20 seats short from winning the majority and had to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats under Nick Clegg.

The expression of *'winner takes all'* indicates the rule of a single party that won an overall majority and was able to avoid a *hung parliament*. However, a close study of the statistical facts would reveal that the winning government secured the support of only little more than 35% to 40% of the popular vote. Thus, the equity of more than 60% of the votes becomes irrelevant. The general elections of 2001 were the last elections that gained the support of 40% of the vote shares (Bogdanor, 2015, p. 31). This would clearly be referred to as a minority rule. The majority of voters would be represented by a government not of their choice, but that of a minority not exceeding one-third of the overall turnout. The electoral system should be considered the most important instrument of *representative democracy* only if it secures the freedom and fairness of at least the majority of its votes. *First Past the Post* is failing to achieve this purpose, especially with the constant changes of the UK electoral geography and the rise of minority political competitors.

2.2. The Rise of Small Parties and a Two Party System

The previous issues of a hung parliament or a government formed by a minority rule could also be related to the rise of small political parties. The decline of support for the two main parties – Conservative and Labour, results in a divergence of voting patterns. The age of pluralism in politics has made it difficult for Members of Parliament to secure a majority of votes at their constituency level or at the national level. Case in point, even the opening of more democratic doors through the divergence of political agendas could jeopardize the concept of representativeness. In other words, the greater the number of parties operating under *First Past the Post*, the more “disproportional” the results would be and the more the deficit of un-representativeness is widened (Lodge & Gottfried, 2011, p. 02). Guy Lodge and Glenn Gottfried make a compelling case against FPTP and the rise of small political parties by stating: “In a time of greater political pluralism, British politics is no longer well served by a voting system that was designed for a two-party era. Nor are the interests of British democracy” (Lodge & Gottfried, 2011, p. 15). However, this does not mean that small parties are gaining power in British parliament. In fact, *First Past the Post* discriminates against small parties, ensuring by that the continuity of the long tradition of the two-party system.

FPTP discriminates against small political parties as it tends to “produce artificial majorities, two-party systems, and one-party governments” (Lijphart, 2008, p. 13). Bogdanor insists that FPTP is unfair to small parties, women and ethnic minorities (as cited in Lijphart, 2008, p. 11). Indeed, votes for small parties are usually “dispersed” in geographical areas where the main parties are widely popular. As a result, some people get discouraged from voting for a minority party that has a very small chance at winning the general elections (*more details on this particular issue in the next point*). Even though small parties are gaining more votes and popularity more recently, it is not enough to cause a major upset in the result of the general election. Lodge and Gottfried claim that for the last 35 years, a quarter of the votes share was cast for a variety of third parties (Lodge & Gottfried, 2011, p. 04). Nonetheless, in the absence of certainty that the support for third parties would continue or diminish, it seems that minority parties are only victims of an “unfair” electoral system, and an obstacle for the main two parties to win the majority of seats.

Although Britain may seem as a multiparty system, considering it has more than 13 political parties, it is actually “based on the existence of two large parties, but no more” (Rohe, 1994, p. 29). *Another element that prevents minority parties from gaining more popularity is the British conservative character. Since 1916, British citizens have always*

voted either Conservative or Labour. Even with the development of a multiparty system nowadays, voters are still attached to their political roots. *The function of the British government performed by a two party system is “secured by the political culture rather than by the law”* (Rohe, 1994, p. 29). *Indeed, a two party system dates back from the Whigs and Tories in the 17th century. It is, therefore, part of the British traditional history and political culture.* British people ensure the continuance of their political culture as part of their inherited traditions with minimum and slow changes, and the relationship between social class and vote is very strong. British people still vote according to their family and political heritage. Studies show that 75% of voters’ electoral decisions are rooted in their family background and social class together with the long-term images of the parties (Farrell & Gallagher, 1999, p. 290). This again undermines the influence of minority parties.

Along with this fundamental conservatism is a fallacy within the structure of the electoral system. FPTP is designed to maintain the elections of two political parties. Its practicality is best shown when only two political parties are competing for power. *Thus, the development of a multiparty system represents a fundamental issue to the democratic fabric of Britain.* *First Past the Post* prefers and results in an avoidable two party system. This is mainly due to the concept of *tactical voting*.

Tactical voting is when a voter votes for another party (usually one of the main parties; Conservative or Labour) in order to defeat his least favored candidate who may still win the election. For instance, if a British citizen, a supporter for the Green Party (a small party), predicts that his party will lose at the elections, he is more likely to vote for the Labour Party (a party he has more in common with), to prevent the Conservative Party from winning. In this case, this citizen abandons his beliefs for the party he really likes, and votes for the party he dislikes the least. A poll from The British Journal and International Relations was held in 1999, where voters were asked to give their opinions about FPTP. One voter’s response was the following:

Well if you vote for something you know you can't come to power you're throwing [your vote] away, aren't you? If you didn't want the conservatives in and you voted Liberal, you're merely just throwing your vote away in 90 per cent of the country (Farrell & Gallagher, 1999, p. 230).

Therefore, the overall choice becomes limited, and support for minor parties tends to be thinly spread as they are denied votes and seats. Indeed, Britain has held a two party system in its general election cycles since 1922. The 1916 general elections were the last elections won by the Liberal Party under Lloyd George. The Conservative and the Labour party have been ever since taking turns over enjoying a majority of votes and governance.

Due to the democratic fallacies in the British electoral system, Britain is now facing a crisis of representation. The discrimination against small parties questions the legitimacy of *First Past the Post*. What David Judge calls a “growing de-legitimation of representative processes” (Judge, 1999, p. 174) reflects a growing fear of impracticality and injustice. From the perspective of those who are not represented due to the discrepancies in their constituencies, or due to the manipulation of *tactical voting*, *First Past the Post* is what Bogdanor condemns as “inequitable, inefficient and socially divisive” (Bogdanor, 2015, p.40).

2.3. Safe Seats Vs Marginal Seats

It is already mentioned that these fallacies are interrelated, forming several gaps within the British democratic fabric. Another cause behind the artificial majority and the discrimination against small parties is the discrepancy between safe and marginal seats. *First*

Past the Post presents yet another issue within the division of its constituencies. There are currently 650 constituencies in Britain. Each party attempts at winning plurality of votes in these constituencies in order to win the majority of seats in the House of Commons (each seat represents one constituency). Some of these constituencies, however, are known as *safe seats* or *strongholds*, i.e. a political party is so popular in a certain constituency that they are almost guaranteed to win. For instance, David Cameron was the former Member of Parliament for the constituency of Witney. The Conservative Party is widely popular there. Indeed, in the 2015 general elections, they won a majority of 60.2% of the vote shares. Thus, any other vote for the Labour Party, Green Party or other independent parties would not have changed or affected the general result.

Marginal seats, however, are the constituencies where political parties could make a swing of vote, and a slight swing could create a major upset and affect the final result. For instance, the Labour Party managed to swing the vote from the Liberal Democrats in Bristol West constituency with 35.7% of the vote shares. In other words, a vote in the constituency of Bristol West is more effective than a vote in the constituency of Witney. The votes for an unpopular political party in a *safe seat* constituency are referred to as *weak votes*. Case in point, *First Past the Post* proves again to be practical for only two competing political parties, as it denies those who inhabit a safe constituency a powerful voice to truly influence the result of the election.

First Past the Post fails at ensuring a democratic representation for all its citizens. Its internal structure contains deficits unacceptable to any democratic system. The denial of seats for minor parties, the wasted and weak votes and the limited choice in the selection of parties all have caused a very low turnout of voters during the years. Levels of turnout at elections have been significantly dropping since the 1992 general elections with 77.7% or the 1997 elections with 71.4%. Even worse, the turnout of the 2015 general elections was only 66.1%. Moreover, any attempt to reform the electoral system has been rejected by the British people. The 2011 referendum introducing the Alternative Vote was refused by 67.9% of the votes. The Alternative Vote[†] would have fixed some of the political deficiencies presented by *First Past the Post*. However, AV is not considered an effective replacement to FPTP, as it seems to confuse the British people even more. *The British Journal and International Relations* concludes its research by stressing that the British people “are in favor of maintaining the current system, if only because they are unable to conceive of any alternatives” (Farrell & Gallagher, 1999, p. 301).

3. The House of Lords

The House of Lords is the second chamber, or the upper house, of the United Kingdom’s parliament. The House of Lords, along with the House of Commons and the Crown, forms the British parliament. The Lords started as an advisory council for the King. After the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, the council gained more power. It was during King Edward III’s reign in the 14th century that Parliament separated into two distinct chambers; the House of Commons, and the House of Lords (consisting of the bishops and the peers). The authority of Parliament continued to grow, and during the early fifteenth century, both Houses exercised powers to a great extent. The Lords were far more powerful than the Commons due to the influence of the great landowners and high priests of the realm.

The House of Lords has evolved over hundreds of years, and like the House of Commons, it continues to change and develop. The total number of persons qualified to sit in

[†]The Alternative Vote (AV) asks voters to rank the candidates by preference; if a candidate receives the majority of first preferences, he or she is elected; if not, the weakest candidate is eliminated and the ballots are redistributed according to second preferences; this process continues until one of the candidates reaches a majority of the votes.

the House of Lords exceeds 670 between life peers, hereditary peers and bishops. The House has several responsibilities in Parliament. Basically, it has two main functions:

How the House spends its time in the chamber

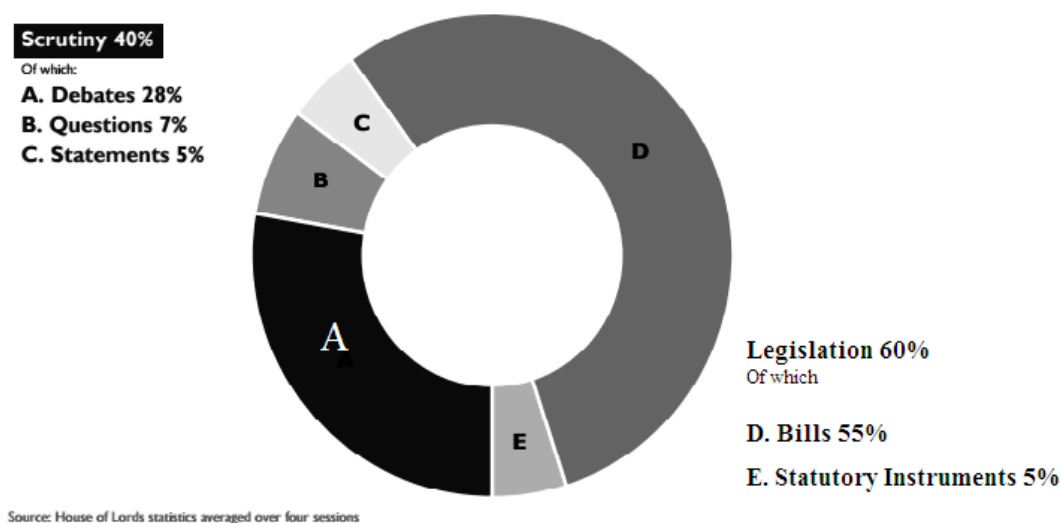


Figure 2. Copyright 2015 by UK Political Info

The House of Lords is a key contributor to the process of initiating, revising and amending legislations. According to Figure 2, it spends 60% of its time in revising these laws. The House checks and challenges the activities of the government. More importantly, the Lords provide independent expertise and wisdom. On occasion, the upper chamber has proved very effective, particularly in defense of welfare rights, animal rights and civil liberties.

Even though the House of Lords has a considerable effective function, there should be no debate on its legitimacy in Britain's *representative democracy*. The House of Lords is not an elected chamber and, therefore, unrepresentative of people's choice. The argument in defense of the House of Lords would be to stress the fact that it has absolutely no role in policy making. Moreover, its defenders claim that the House is part of Britain's strongest traditions, voluntarily serving the public with valuable expertise. Nonetheless, truth remains that these arguments do not legitimize the existence of such parliamentary pillar in a *representative democracy*. More importantly, the House of Lords, despite of what it is generally conceived, still has some effective influence on certain public cases. The Lords are predominantly selected by politicians in power instead of the people. Some of these politicians have admitted the absurdity of such institution in a democratic nation, and have desperately attempted to radically reform the House. This article traces the history of the House's reforms to give a better understanding on how it used to be and the changes that occurred to it. Furthermore, it sheds light on the kind of practices that would de-legitimize their existence in a twenty-first century *representative democracy*. Finally, it explains why the House of Lords is considered a deficit in the British democratic system, and why it has been so difficult to make a radical and democratic difference in its structure.

3.1. The House of Lords: Reforms

Although The House has been subject to many changes and reforms, it still represents a deficit in Britain's democracy. The Parliament Act 1911 was the first major change introduced by Lloyd George to restrict the authority of the Lords. Reform of the House was a top priority on Lloyd George's agenda. He believed that "five hundred men, chosen

accidentally from amongst the unemployed, was plainer still” (as cited in Ward, 2004, p. 182). Evidently, he played a major role in securing the passage of the Parliament Act 1911 which ended the House’s power to block finance bills, as well as limiting the power to delay other forms of legislation. The Act provided that money bills approved by the Commons became law if not passed without amendment by the Lords within one month. In other words, The Parliament Act 1911 effectively abolished the power of the House of Lords to reject legislation, or to amend them in a way unacceptable to the House of Commons.

Nonetheless, the House of Lords was still a full hereditary house, where most Lords were imbedded in their Conservative origins. They obstructed most of the Labour’s propositions and bills. This issue became unbearable, especially after the end of the Second World War. Therefore, the Life Peerages Act 1958 was introduced in attempts to modernize and legitimize the House of Lords. It permitted the creation of peerages for life through selection, with no limit on numbers or sex. Life peerages would carry the right to sit and vote in The House of Lords. The House became a combination of hereditary peers and appointed life peers.[‡] Over 40 years later, the Labour Party under Tony Blair included in its 1997 general election Manifesto a commitment to remove the hereditary peerage from the House of Lords. Tony Blair stated that: “it is in principle wrong and absurd that people should wield power on the basis of birth not merit or election” (as cited in Ward, 2004, p. 183). The Labour Government introduced legislation to expel all hereditary peers from the Upper House. As a part of a compromise, however, The House of Lords Act 1999 permitted 92 hereditary peers to remain until the reforms were complete. Thus, all but 92 hereditary peers were expelled under this act, making the House of Lords predominantly an appointed house.

3.2. Public Interest or Government’s Image?

It is common to the defenders of the House of Lords to insist that the Lords never exceed their position, trespass the laws or abuse their power. However, Ian Ward makes a compelling case against the Lords by accumulating facts that prove otherwise. For instance, Ward claims that the Lords continue to ignore all manner of “statutory responsibilities,” regarding the sale of bogus wine to the public, and neglect the more important issues such as work and safety responsibilities and the pollution of water-tanks (Ward, 2004, p. 50). In more alarming issues, the Lords stress the weight of their “juridical prerogatives.” For example, in the Matrix Churchill case in 1992[§], a case that should have been fully disclosed to the people, the Lords desperately attempted to block its disclosure in order not to tarnish the British government with such scandal. Moreover, in 1942, the House of Lords refused to release important documents related to the death of ninety-nine submarines during naval tests (Ward, 2004, p. 57). What might be conceived as ‘protection of public interest’ is in fact ‘protection of the government’s image’ since the people has the right to hold its government accountable in these matters. Ward insists that instead of promoting the ‘public interest’ like they claim, the Lords constantly promote “government secrecy” (Ward, 2004, p. 60). These kinds of practices de-legitimize the House of Lord in a twenty-first century *representative democracy*. In the framework of any kind of democracy, this is considered an abuse of power disguised as ‘public interest.’

[‡] Life peers are elevated to the peerage by the monarch through the proposition and advice of the Prime Minister. The PM usually appoints only peers for his own party, but allows opposition parties to recommend other fellow peers. Unlike hereditary peers, if a life peer dies, the seat is not passed on to his relatives.

[§] The Matrix Churchill case, also known as Arms-to-Iraq case, where information were disclosed on the government endorsing the sale of arms by British companies to Iraq, under the rule of Saddam Hussein.

3.3. A 'Retirement Home' and 'Cash for Peerages'

Despite the introduction of free political appointment based on merits by the Life Peerages Act 1958, this system has also proved to be highly problematic. Now old Members of Parliament are being “edged out” of safe seats in the House of Commons to bring forward new and fresh members, and are given a position in the Lords as compensation. The fact that the House of Lords is increasingly serving as a 'retirement home' for ex-Members of Parliament further reduces its credibility. Despite having been voted out of office, some politicians are rewarded with a permanent seat in the Lords. Therefore, the House of Lords is increasingly seen as “subservient” to the Commons, with political appointees more likely to obey the party that put them in power. More importantly, a party donor could be gifted a seat in return for their donation and contribution. For instance; a 'cash for peerages' or 'cash for honors' scandal erupted in 2006 in which some of those appointed Lords had made significant donations to the governing Labour party. More recently in 2012, “critical” suspicions rose against David Cameron for his “unregulated appointments” of 117 peers in less than a year (Worley, 2016). Furthermore, life peers' allowances are questionably rising. Recently, Lord Farmer, a millionaire Conservative Party donor who sits in the House of Lords has said that the allowance of £300 per day in the second chamber is "inadequate" (Worley, 2016). Evidently, some Lords think they should be rewarded more for their valuable expertise. The intentions behind the selection of some peers prove un-democratic which creates a crisis of legitimization in the House of Lords.

3.4. Resistance to Change

The 21st century brought little changes to the House of Lords. Nonetheless, a major attempt by the Liberal Democrats Party was introduced in their House of Lords Reform Bill 2011. The Conservatives' lack of majority in the 2010 general elections made them vulnerable to the demands of the Liberal Democrats who wanted to reform the House of Lords in a more drastic way. The Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition agreed to reform the House to a wholly or mainly elected (by the people) second chamber. The Bill proposed that the upper chamber would continue to be known as the House of Lords for legislative purposes. Moreover, the reformed House of Lords should have 300 members of which 240 are elected members and 60 are appointed members. Elections to the reformed Lords should take place at the same time as elections to the House of Commons. Moreover, there will no longer be a link between the peerage system and membership of the upper house. Finally, the current powers of the House of Lords would not change and the House of Commons would retain its status as the primary House of Parliament. The Bill, however, failed and was abandoned by the Government due to opposition from within the Conservative Party. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the Lords from a Conservative political alliance represent the majority in the House of Lords with 250 appointed peers and 42 hereditary peers.

Polly Toynbee states that: “The House of Lords is a closed political world in an increasingly open society in which citizen democracy and grassroots activism flourish, not least through social media. There is a danger that it will start to feel increasingly archaic” (Toynbee, 2012). Over the past 100 years of British history, anxieties about the duties and accountability of the House of Lords have triggered numerous inquiries and parliamentary votes, but overall, little has changed. The *State of the Nation* poll has consistently shown that the British people want a wholly or substantially elected House of Lords. Asked to choose from a range of options for who should sit in a reformed House of Lords, 28% of people chose a 'wholly elected second chamber', while 39% support a 'mixture of elected and appointed members, with more than half of them elected'. In other words, two thirds (67%) want a wholly elected House of Lords or a mixed second chamber with a majority of elected over appointed members (Toynbee, 2012). There is an increasing desire for change and reform of the House of Lords, to bring forward a more democratic and up-to-date system.

However, many people seem confused by the alternatives proposed to alter the upper chamber, one of Britain's oldest political institutions.

To conclude, *representative democracy* should be about people's choice in voicing their desired future for the country. More British citizens are now pointing to the gravity of this crisis of democracy. Indeed, *First Past the Post* does not ensure a 'fair' representation for all parts of Britain. The decline in electoral turnout is the most obvious reason why there seems to be a "crisis of democracy in Britain" (Bromley et al., 2004, p. 06). The crisis of representation has made British citizens rather skeptical about the political process in their country. More importantly, politicians have been attempting to amend these fallacies by introducing political reforms. Nonetheless, their efforts have been met with staunch refusal and utter skepticism. The resistance to change could be widely attributed to the British conservative character. The ongoing existence of the oldest forms of government such as the Monarchy or the House of Lords, where positions of power are given to hereditary or selected people is an obvious reason why Britain is still facing democratic deficits, and still reluctant to make radical changes.

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