

Party membership

Tim Bale, Monica Poletti and Paul Webb analyse the characteristics of Liberal Democrat members in 1997 and 2015

The same but different: Lib De



STEREOTYPES OF PARTY members abound. The Conservative Party conference conjures up images of blue-rinse dragons and oleaginous Tory boys. Think Labour, think sharp-suited Blairite-wannabees mixing with trade unionists and dressed-down radicals. And the Lib Dems? Beard and sandals, naturally. Ridiculous of course, but all the more persistent for that.

Which is why the academics Patrick Seyd, Paul Whiteley, and their various collaborators, did everyone a favour when, back in the 1990s they carried out survey research on the memberships of all three parties – research published in three books: *Labour's Grassroots*, *True Blues*, and then, a few years later, *Third Force Politics*, which dealt with the Lib Dems.¹

m members in 1999 and 2015

But that was then and this is now. Or rather, this is two years ago, since a lot may also have changed since the 2015 general election. When Liberal Democrat members were surveyed in 1999 by Seyd, Whiteley and Billingham, there were 83,000 of them, Paddy Ashdown was the leader, the party had no experience of government, the Tories were in turmoil and New Labour reigned supreme. It all seems like a long time ago. Since then we have had the Iraq War and the Global Financial Crisis. We have also seen the Lib Dems go into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 only to be spat out into opposition five years later, leaving them with around 45,000 members, a figure that went up to 60,000 members after Nick Clegg's resignation speech.² It was at that point – May 2015 – that, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and as part of a project covering six British parties, we carried out the latest academic survey of Lib Dem members.³ Our method was different: where the pioneers gained the cooperation of the party to use postal surveys, we used YouGov's internet panel to find the members we questioned.⁴ But many of the questions we asked were, quite deliberately, either identical or very similar.⁵ We are therefore in a position to see whether the party's members have changed much over a decade and a half, although we cannot, of course, completely discount the possibility that at least some of the differences (or indeed similarities) we detect are artefacts of different sampling methods

With that caveat in mind, we look first at demographics – who were and are the members? Next, we take a look at their political views on a few key indicators. Then we touch briefly on how they came to join the party before moving on to what they do for it and how active they are, both at general elections and between them. We finish by looking at what they think of the party they belong to and whether being a Lib Dem member has lived up to their expectations. Our focus in each section is to assess whether there appears

to be change over time and to propose a few explanations as to why things have (or have not) changed.

Demographics

Some two-thirds of the more than five and a half thousand members of six parties that we surveyed just after the 2015 general election were men. As we can see from Table 1, the 2015 Lib Dem membership, therefore, was about average in this respect – the party contained a higher proportion of men than women than did Labour, the Greens and the SNP, but a lower proportion than did the Tories and UKIP. This represents quite a change, however, from the situation prevailing in 1999, when the gender imbalance was rather less obvious. Even then, however, it was the case that there were more male than female members, in spite of the fact that out there in the electorate, the Lib Dems picked up more votes from women than they did from men – something that was also the case (indeed more so) in 2015. It is worth noting, however, that we may well be underestimating the gender balance in the party: certainly, well-informed sources suggest that the proportion of women is closer to a half than a third.⁶

When it comes to age, however, Table 1 tells a different tale. The average age of a Lib Dem member in 2015 is, at 51 years old, eight years younger than it was in 1999. Looking in more detail, the picture looks quite encouraging for the party in that it seems to have more younger members in the younger age brackets and fewer older members in the older age brackets in 2015 than was the case sixteen years previously.⁸ This is counterbalanced, however, by a more depressing story when it comes to voters. Perhaps as a result of its leadership agreeing to the coalition's tripling of tuition fees, the party found it impossible to recruit the same proportion of young voters as it did young members – in marked contrast to 1999.

Left: Liberal Democrats on the march for Europe, London, March 2017

The same but different: Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015

Table 1: Lib Dem members and voters compared (%)				
	<i>Members 1999</i>	<i>Members 2015</i>	<i>LD voters 1997</i>	<i>LD voters 2015⁷</i>
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	54	68	47	43
Female	46	32	53	57
<i>Age</i>				
18–25	2	10	12	5
26–35	5	16	19	12
36–45	11	13	21	16
46–55	23	13	19	19
56–65	22	17	12	22
65+	36	31	17	26
Mean age	59	51	47	53
<i>Education</i>				
Graduate	42	56	16	44
<i>Employment</i>				
In full-time education	2	8	4	1
Employed	50	51	59	62
Unemployed	2	2	2	2
Retired	32	35	19	30
Looking after the home/Not working	6	3	10	4
<i>Sector worked in</i>				
Public	46	32	29	n/a
Private firm	38	36	54	n/a
Self-employed	n/a	19	n/a	n/a
Charity/voluntary work/other	n/a	11	n/a	n/a
<i>Religious</i>				
Yes	65	22	64	52
No	15	29	36	48
No response	20	49	<1	0
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
White	99	94	98	93

** 28% of the sample (half of whom were pensioners who were asked to tell us what their last job was) did not answer this question and were excluded; but there is no reason to suppose that non-respondents' and respondents' answers would be markedly dissimilar).*

Perhaps the most striking continuity between the Lib Dem membership of 1999 and 2015 is in their employment status. Clearly, given what we see in Table 1 (and with a caveat about the comparability of the figures addressed in the note beneath it) there seems to have been a change in that fewer members appear to be employed in the public sector in 2015 than in 1999, no doubt due to its shrinking importance in the economy. It is also noticeable that many more of the 2015 members are graduates – a difference that may well be accounted for, at least in part, by the expansion of higher education that accelerated under the New Labour government and has carried on since then. This is even more noticeable when we look at voters. Apart from that, however, the two groups of members look very similar, with around half

working and a third of them retired. Lib Dem voters, on the other hand, are more markedly retired than in 1999.

The most striking contrast between the two groups occurs when we look at faith. As we see from Table 1, in 1999, almost two-thirds of Lib Dem members declared they were religious. Sixteen years later that was the case for only just over a fifth, with the number saying they were not religious doubling and the proportion declining to answer increasing even more. Whether this has to do with the ongoing secularisation of British society or British liberalism coming more into line with a longstanding continental tradition of laicity, or both, is difficult to tell. It may even reflect the fact that respondents no longer feel that declaring a religion is a more socially

acceptable answer to give to a researcher than declaring none. Or it could just be an artefact of different response rates to this question: much higher in 1999 than in 2015. Whatever, if it does reflect a real change, it means that Lib Dem members are now rather more representative of voters as a whole. That is not the case, however, when it comes to ethnicity. Although, there has been progress in this respect – in 1999 all but 1 per cent of Lib Dem members were white whereas in 2015 some 6 per cent were from a minority background, with voters following a similar pattern – the party (in common, it has to be said, with other parties) has some way to go before it represents society as a whole since, according to the 2011 census, some 13 per cent of people in the UK were from ethnic minorities.

Ideology

Membership surveys tend to ask a battery of issue-related questions, often identical to those asked in election surveys. These can then be aggregated in order to produce an overall picture of whether members are left or right wing, libertarian or authoritarian. In this case, for the sake of simplicity as well as comparability, Table 2 shows the results for a couple of signature issues, one which captures members’ views on the left–right (or state–market) dimension, the other which captures their views on the libertarian–authoritarian dimension (which includes views on matters of law and order, censorship, immigration, the discipline and education of children). What it suggests is that Lib Dem members in 2015 were some way to the left of their counterparts a decade and a half previously, which is interesting in view of the conventional wisdom that many of the party’s more left-wing members were burned off following the decision to go into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 and the austerity policies that flowed from it: either this was not the case or, if it was, then, had they stayed, the membership in 2015 would have been even more to the left of the membership in 1999 than they already appear

to be. Another possibility is that the results are somewhat influenced by more left-leaning members who (re)joined immediately after the demise of the coalition. Whatever, this change is all the more noticeable because support for redistribution in the wider electorate is not as widespread as it once was.

Just as interestingly, 2015 Lib Dem members appear to be considerably more ‘progressive’ (i.e. less authoritarian) than their 1999 counterparts, judging at least from their views on sentencing policy. Given this shift is unlikely to have occurred as a result of the exodus from the party during the coalition – after all, with the exception of immigration, it was not seen as a particularly ‘reactionary’ government when it came to such matters – then it would seem to reflect a more long-term change. Lib Dems, in other words, have become, rather appositely, more liberal since the turn of the century. This is likely to be associated with the fact that a significant proportion of the 2015 members are younger and more likely to be educated to degree level than their 1999 counterparts: youth and education are, we know, correlated with more progressive social views.

Surveys also routinely ask members (and voters) where they would place themselves on a scale running from very left wing to very right wing. Table 3 shows what happens when we do this. It suggests that, in spite of the fact that, on the issues, 2015 Lib Dem members appear to have moved to the liberal-left of their 1999 counterparts, they still like to think of themselves in pretty much the same way, namely as on the centre-left, with the emphasis as much, if not more so, on the centre than on the left. This suggests that locating themselves in that space has become very much a fixed part of Lib Dem identity – at least for party members (and probably for habitual Lib Dem voters too).

We also asked (prior to the Brexit referendum, of course) whether any Lib Dem members were in favour of the UK leaving the EU. When the same question was asked in 1999, researchers found 6 per cent of the membership would like to have

Table 2: Lib Dem members on the left–right/authoritarian–libertarian dimensions (%)

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>Redistribute wealth to less well-off/ ordinary working people</i>					
1999	7	39	32	19	2
2015	18	57	16	8	1
<i>Stiffer sentences for criminals</i>					
1999	14	31	30	21	3
2015	4	17	35	36	9

Table 3: Left–right self-placement of Lib Dem members, 2015 and 1999 (%)

<i>Left–right scale</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1999	3	8	25	28	23	8	4	1	1	0
2015	3	7	24	30	23	10	3	<1	<1	0

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Table 4: Political efficacy, Lib Dem members in 1999 and 2015 (%)						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>A person like me could make a good job of being a councillor/MP</i>						
	1999	12	30	18	28	12
	2015	30	42	14	10	4
<i>People like me can have a real influence in politics if they are prepared to get involved</i>						
	1999	9	60	16	14	1
	2015	30	60	7	2	<1
<i>When the party members work together they can really change the local community/the country</i>						
	1999	16	73	9	2	0
	2015	36	57	6	1	0

seen the UK quit. By 2015 the figure was just 2 per cent – proof, if proof were needed, of how much of an article of faith the UK’s membership had become among Lib Dem members by then, and one reason, of course, why, aside from principle and potential electoral gains, Tim Farron had no choice but to put the party on the side of the 48 per cent of the country which voted ‘Remain’ in June 2016.

Joining the party

One of the preoccupations of those who study members is why some people join political parties when so many others – including people who have a strong affinity with those parties and therefore might be expected to be interested in joining – do not. The answer – proven again and again and not just in the UK – lies in a variety of incentives, the most important of which political scientists label as *collective* (the desire to see a party’s policies enacted for the good of society) and *expressive* (an affinity with the party and its principles), and a strong sense of what they label *political efficacy* (the belief that one can make a difference).⁹ This is exactly what the study of the Lib Dems’ 1999 members found and is what we fully expect to find when we finally complete our project. Indeed, when it comes to a sense of political efficacy we can see from Table 4 that, if anything, it was higher among the 2015 membership than it was among their 1999 counterparts. This may have been positively affected by the experience of belonging to a party of government, but it could also have something to do with who did and did not stick with the party after 2010, with the fact that 2015 members are more highly educated (something which correlates with a stronger sense of efficacy), and with the fact that the 2015 survey attracted more responses from active rather than inactive members

That said, there are some differences – most obviously when it comes to the strength of members’ attachment to the party. As Table 5 shows, the 2015 membership seem to feel more strongly attached to the Lib Dems than their 1999 counterparts. The most obvious short-term explanation

of this may be that the trials and tribulations of the coalition between 2010 and 2015 resulted in more weakly attached members leaving the party, leaving mainly the most strongly attached. In the longer term, it may simply be the case that by 2015, the party had been going for getting on for thirty years, whereas in 1999 it had not long since celebrated its tenth birthday, emerging from a sometimes tricky merger between the Liberals and the SDP. True, many 1999 members would have come from those two parties meaning that for them, the party had in effect been around rather longer than ten years. Nevertheless, the affinity members felt in 2015 may well have been stronger because it related to a more established institution and brand.

Those of us who are interested in *why* people join political parties are also interested in *how* they join, and here (in Table 6) we can see some change. First of all, of course, there are routes into the party (indeed, all parties) that are now taken for granted but which back in 1999 involved technology/media that was nowhere near so ubiquitous, assuming it existed at all. The 5 per cent of 2015 members who were prompted by a tweet or by something on Facebook were doing something none of their counterparts in 1999 would even have recognised. And although emails and websites were around then,

Table 5: Party identification of Lib Dem members, 1999 and 2015 (%)		
Attachment to the party	1999	2015
Very strong	26	61
Fairly strong	49	35
Not very/not at all strong	25	4

Table 6: How Lib Dem members join, 1999 and 2015 (%)		
Means of contact	1999	2015
Via telephone/door to door canvassing	13	8
In response to PPB	4	13
Family member	7	11
Friends	13	19
Colleague	1	5

Table 7: Lib Dem party members' activity, 1999 and 2015		
	<i>Members, 1999</i>	<i>Members, 2015</i>
<i>Time devoted to party activity in the last/average month</i>		
None	54	37
Up to 5 hours	29	33
5-10 hours	7	13
10-20 hours	4	9
20-30 hours	2	3
30-40 hours	1	1
More than 40 hours	3	4
<i>Attendance at meetings per year</i>		
Not at all	53	27
Rarely (1-2 times)	17	15
Occasionally (3-5 times)	11	23
Frequently (5 or more times)	20	35
<i>In the last five years, have you occasionally or frequently</i>		
Displayed an election poster	44	58
Signed a Lib Dem petition	15	77
Donated money to the Lib Dems	26	68
Delivered election leaflets	46	65
Helped at a party function	16	40
Canvassed voters	18	43
Stood for office within the party	8	30
Stood in local or national elections	9	33
<i>During the general election*</i>		
Displayed an election poster	70	38
Attend a public meeting/party rally	22	28
Delivered election leaflets	54	46
Canvassed voters	30	33
Helped run a committee room	19	13
Liked something by the party or candidate on Facebook	n/a	47
Tweeted or re-tweeted party or candidate messages on Twitter	n/a	31
<i>Compared to five years ago, are you</i>		
More active	15	24
Less active	41	28
About the same	45	31
<i>* 1999 members answers refer to the 1997 general election, whereas 2015 answers refer to the 2015 general election</i>		

as well as (believe it or not!) party political broadcasts, generates more.

Activists

The idea that five years of coalition with the Conservatives reduced the Lib Dem membership to a dedicated few is hard to resist when we look at what members did for the party in 1999 and 2015 respectively. As Table 7 shows, back in 1999, just over half of Lib Dem members admitted to doing absolutely nothing for the party beyond paying their subscriptions. By 2015 that was true of only just over a third of them. That said, the proportion of hard-core activists – those committing over twenty hours a month to the party on an ongoing basis – does not appear to be that different, in both cases coming in under 10 per cent. What the party seems to have been able to do by 2015 was to mobilise more of its members into doing just a bit of work for it. It also seems to have persuaded more of them – or they seem to have persuaded themselves – that it was more worthwhile attending party meetings, possibly because the content and/or the form of those meetings has changed over the years to make them more accessible and even enjoyable.

What is most striking, however, is that members in 2015 were – or were at least claiming to be – doing much more in the previous five years than their 1999 counterparts when it came to individual activities. It could be, of course, that our 2015 sample was more prone to exaggeration, and we suspect that many hard-core activists would find it very hard to believe that so many of their less active colleagues claim to have undertaken what political scientists would label ‘high-intensity’ activities like canvassing, let alone standing for party or public office. On the other hand, as the number of members reduced during the coalition years, it is inevitable, given the fact that the number of posts and candidacies stayed the same, that more people would have been called on to stand – many of them of course in circumstances where winning was highly unlikely, meaning they were in effect ‘paper candidates’ engaging in what in reality was a fairly low-intensity activity. We also have to remind ourselves, once again, that changes in technology have made it much, much easier these days not just to sign petitions and make donations but even to canvass voters without leaving the comfort of one’s own home. Those same changes may also help to explain why the 2015 membership seems to have delivered even more leaflets than its 1999 counterpart: those leaflets are now easier to produce meaning there are more of them that need distributing. Another reason might also be related to the fact that the national party is probably better able to directly stimulate local activity now, through the use of emails or social media for instance, than it was before those technologies were so widely used.

recruitment via those means (which prompted 23 per cent of 2015 members to join) was not even presented as an option in the (postal) surveys that went out to members in 1999. Still, when we look at means that were available in both years, we see some differences. Canvassing appears to generate fewer members nowadays. But, notwithstanding fears that we spend more time with our devices than with people these days, face-to-face contact with family, friends and colleagues,

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<i>'The Lib Dems are ...'</i>	Very	Fairly	Neither	Fairly	Very	<i>'The Lib Dems are ...'</i>
Extreme	<1 (<1)	5 (1)	42 (21)	41 (41)	12 (37)	Moderate
United	15 (19)	60 (41)	12 (25)	11 (13)	1 (2)	Divided
Good for one class	1 (<1)	4 (<1)	21 (5)	38 (32)	36 (62)	Good for all classes
Middle class	4 (5)	36 (32)	52 (59)	6 (3)	1 (1)	Working class
Left wing	1 (1)	36 (36)	58 (59)	5 (3)	<1 (<1)	Right wing
Efficiently run	15 (10)	59 (34)	13 (38)	11 (15)	1 (3)	Badly run

Fascinatingly, however, the 2015 general election actually saw a decline in the proportion of Lib Dem members undertaking individual activities compared to the proportion of members who undertook them at the 1997 election. The difference surely can be accounted for by the fact that in 1997 the party appeared to be on the up electorally whereas in 2015 it was indubitably on the way down (and, in many constituencies it had won in 2010, out). Not only was activity down almost across the board (the exception – just – being canvassing, apparently) it was down most in the activity that most clearly involved members (even relatively passive members) ‘nailing their colours to the mast’, namely displaying an election poster.¹⁰ Forget shy Tory voters, there were clearly quite a few shy Lib Dem members in 2015!

For all that, of course, we should note that some of the differences in activity between the two groups of members can probably be accounted for by the timing of the surveys. In 1999, members were a couple of years into what was still effectively New Labour’s honeymoon period – a period in which the Blair administration had not really done much to prompt protest and outrage against its policies. 1999, then, probably constituted something of a fallow period for the Lib Dems and Lib Dem members. It might also be that two years after the electoral campaign, some of the members might have been more likely to remember doing more than they actually did. The 2015 survey, on the other hand, was taken a few weeks after an election which left many of the members surveyed dismayed but also inclined, perhaps, to want to attest that they had done all they possibly could for the party in the last few years if not perhaps at the election itself. This – and the fact that the coalition years had left the party with a smaller but relatively dedicated membership – helps account for the fact that members in 2015 were significantly more likely than members in 1999 to think they were more active (and considerably less likely to think they were less active) than they had been previously.

<i>'Being a member has ...'</i>	1999	2015
Fully lived up to expectations	43	45
Partly lived up to expectations	49	48
Not really lived up to expectations	7	7
Not at all lived up to expectations	1	0

And talking of timing, one of the biggest differences, of course, is in social media use: it is sometimes easy to forget that Facebook and Twitter have not been around forever; no doubt if they had been, Lib Dem members in 1999 would have been using them!

Members' views of the party

In both 1999 and 2015 Lib Dem members were asked about how they saw their party by getting them to place the party on a series of continuums. Table 8 shows the answers given by the 1999 membership together with those given by the 2015 membership in parentheses beside them.

In both 1999 and 2015 the party was predominantly seen by its members in similar ways: moderate, united, good for all classes, neither left nor right and efficiently run. Comparing members' views in 2015 with those in 1999, however, we find that in 2015 the party was seen by its members as more moderate, slightly less united, and slightly less middle class (but also less working class) than was the case in 1999. But, interestingly in view of the fact that the Liberal Democrats spent five years in an austerity coalition with the Conservatives, the two groups placed the party in almost exactly the same space ideologically: there is no sense that, in the eyes of the 2015 membership anyway, the so-called ‘Orange Bookers’ had grabbed hold of the party and driven it to the right; indeed, if anything, those members seem convinced that it had held on to its centre-left or radical-centrist identity. Quite why fewer of them than was the case in 1999 thought the party was well-run is unclear

– and may be something that members reading this have a view on.¹¹

Any difference on this score, however, does not seem to have translated into a difference in the way members in 1999 and 2015 rated their overall experience of belonging to the Lib Dems. As Table 9, shows, satisfaction levels in the two groups were not only impressively high but almost identical. No doubt staff at headquarters would love to know why just over half of all members still say that their experience has only *partly* rather than *fully* lived up to expectations, but they should be reasonably pleased with the response. On the other hand, that response is perhaps what we should have expected given that many of those with more negative experiences will presumably have been more likely to have left the party, ensuring that their views will have gone unrecorded in our 2015 survey (although not, we hope, in a survey of those who left all six parties covered in our study, carried out in 2017).

Conclusion

Ultimately, then, as much has stayed the same as has changed. Demographically, the Lib Dems' 2015 membership may be more likely to be male, more likely to be a little younger, more likely to be graduates, more likely to work in the public sector and a little less likely to be religious and a little less likely to be white. But they do not look that different from their equivalents in 1999. Ideologically, they may be a little more socially liberal and a little more inclined to support redistribution. But they still see themselves as very much in the same centre-left/radical-centre, Europhile space as their counterparts did sixteen years previously. They also locate their party in almost exactly the same place, even if they are inclined to see it as slightly more moderate, and slightly less middle class and united. Both sets of members display a strong sense of political efficacy and attachment to the party, although, if anything, that sense of efficacy and attachment is stronger now than it was back then. There are some differences in how each group came to be recruited. But they are not great – and face-to-face contact still matters in this respect. When it comes to activism, the differences are more striking: the 2015 members seem to be more active between general elections than their counterparts in 1999, although they may actually have done less for the party in the election of that year than was done for it by activists in the contest held in 1997. None of this, however, seems to have impacted much on their levels of satisfaction: for the vast majority both in 1999 and 2015 being a Lib Dem member has – at least in part if not always fully – lived up to their expectations.

Surveys, of course, are more akin to snapshots than videos. We have made a few (hopefully) educated guesses to try to explain why things have

(and have not) changed in the decade and a half between the fielding of one questionnaire and the other. And we will certainly be able to delve deeper into what 'our' (2015) respondents look like, how they think, and what they do – and draw some interesting comparisons between Lib Dem members and the members of the other five parties we are researching. We also look forward to comparing 2015 members with members we have been able to survey after the 2017 election. For now, we must leave it to others (including, of course, regular readers of this journal) to analyse how the party has changed between the end of the twentieth century and the second decade of the twenty-first.

Tim Bale and Monica Poletti (School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary University of London) and Paul Webb (Department of Politics, University of Sussex) run the ESRC-funded Party Members Project. This article was therefore supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/M007537/1).

- 1 Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Labour's Grassroots: The Politics of Party Membership* (Clarendon, 1992); Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Clarendon, 1994); and Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Antony Billingham, *Third Force Politics: Liberal Democrats at the Grassroots* (OUP, 2006).
- 2 For Lib Dem membership figures since 1989 see the webpage maintained by the indefatigable Mark Pack: <http://www.markpack.org.uk/143767/liberal-democrat-membership-figures/>
- 3 For details of the project, see www.esrcpartymembersproject.org. While there are plenty of blogposts and media pieces referred to on the website, the project is just beginning to publish its findings in academic journals. The project will eventually – we hope in 2018 or 2019 – produce a book covering all its main findings.
- 4 The members' survey was conducted in May 2015. YouGov recruited the survey respondents from a panel of around 300,000 volunteers who are paid in redeemable points for completing a survey. Upon joining the YouGov panel, volunteers complete a survey asking a broad range of demographic questions which are subsequently used to recruit respondents matching desired demographic quotas for surveys. Potential respondents for the party member survey were identified from questions asking individuals if they were members of any of a list of large membership organisations, including the political parties. Results reported in this article are not weighted in any way since there are no known official population parameters for the Liberal Democrats memberships. However, YouGov party membership surveys using unweighted data have previously generated predictions for (Labour) party leadership contests that come very close (that is within 1 per cent) to the final official outcome, which gives us some confidence in the quality of the data, as does a comparison between our data on, for example, UKIP, and a survey of its membership carried out by Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley for

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their book on Brexit. All in all we surveyed 5,696 members from six parties. The number of responses varied, mainly according to the size of the parties. We had responses from 730 Lib Dem members. Note that, because this is not a random probability sample one cannot, strictly speaking, compute a margin of error for our data but given the size of our sample and the estimated membership of the Lib Dems, a standard calculator would put it at a little under 4 per cent (with a 95 per cent confidence level). If anyone would like to help us weight our sample by supplying official party data, please get in touch.

- 5 Note that we have, where possible, simplified matters for the reader in the tables by using just one form of words that encompasses both surveys' questions where there were slight (but, importantly, inconsequential) differences in wording. Where the wording of questions on the same topic diverged too much to facilitate a fair comparison, we have excluded those topics and/or those questions in this article.
- 6 See <https://www.markpack.org.uk/122620/lib-dem-membership-gender-balance/>
- 7 Frequencies for Lib Dem voters taken from

BES 1997 (N=459) and have been weighted with the Britain whole sample weight (wtallgb), whereas those taken from BES 2015 (N=158) have been weighted with the combined main study weight (capped selection plus capped demographic weights) (wt_combined_main_capped)

- 8 This may possibly result from an increased willingness among younger members to complete an internet survey, although – contrary to what many assume – YouGov and other internet pollsters do not routinely find it difficult to get older generations to assist with their work: younger people may be more tech-savvy but there are plenty of silver-surfers out there, many of whom, if they are retired, are rather less time-poor than their younger counterparts.
- 9 For a valuable insight into party membership in a number of European countries, see Emilie van Haute and Anika Gauja, *Party Members and Activists* (Routledge, 2017).
- 10 Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed that 2015 sample say they displayed an election poster over the last five years a lot more frequently than the 1999 sample, but at a lesser rate when asked about the most recent

election. Note, however, that the question asking about the last five years does not necessarily refer to the national campaign, meaning that somebody who has displayed election posters for local campaigns but not for national campaigns will be included in this figure. Also, the figure includes those who have displayed election poster either 'frequently' or 'occasionally'. The percentage of 2015 members referring to 'frequently' is 30 per cent, whereas the percentage referring to those displaying posters 'occasionally' is 28 per cent. The difference between the figure reported in 2015 for the last five years and at the last general election, compared to 1999 figures, might be due to a different balance between those who replied 'frequently' and 'occasionally' to the 'five years' question, and to the type of the election referred to. Moreover, members might have been willing to publicly express their vote for the Lib Dems in the 2010 general election (which presumably is taken into account in their answers) than in the post-coalition 2015 general election (when the party was less popular).

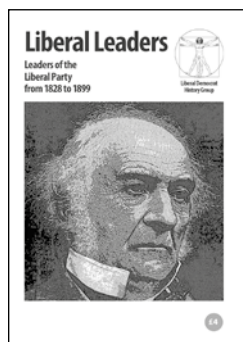
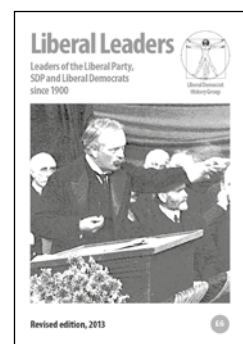
- 11 We can be contacted via partymembersproject@gmail.com

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