

Cooperation without consequence? A review of participation in All-Party Parliamentary Groups by members of the House of Lords versus members of the House of Commons

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Abstract

How do legislators behave when freed from the need for re-election? Most research comparing the behaviour of elected and appointed legislators focuses on formal legislative votes – an activity that is largely compulsory for both groups and based on choices that are externally derived. This paper seeks to overcome such constraints by instead examining a widespread, self-selecting behaviour undertaken both elected and appointed legislators: participation in all-party groups (APGs). APGs are informal bodies that are established by legislators from multiple parties who voluntarily collaborate on policy issues. Past research has found that electoral concerns can shape both the nature and level of APG participation, with legislators tending to join groups on issues that are important to their constituencies, and electorally vulnerable legislators tending to join more groups than those who are electorally secure. However, to date there has been no analysis of APG activity among appointed legislators. This paper fills this gap by comparing APG participation by members of the British House of Commons and members of the House of Lords. Drawing on statistical analyses of APG membership data from 1996 to 2014 it finds that peers are generally less likely to take part in APG activity as compared to MPs, suggesting that representational pressures drive greater engagement among the latter even though they face greater pressures on their time. However, there are several demographic and political factors, including years of service, gender, party, and the holding of a front-bench role, that have similar impacts on APG participation among parliamentarians of both types. This commonality suggests that the behaviour of elected and appointed legislators are in fact shaped by many of the same forces.

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1 Introduction

How do legislators behave when they do not face the requirement for re-election? Although uncommon, appointed legislative chambers persist in several advanced democracies, including the United Kingdom and Canada. Indeed, rather than dwindling in importance, the reforms made to the House of Lords has led to a resurgence in its willingness to intervene in legislative debates (Russell 2013). However, comparing the behaviour of elected versus appointed legislators is typically challenging given that they do not participate in the same legislative activities at the same time. Moreover, each legislative chamber has its own procedural rules that shape how members operate, limiting the inferences that can be drawn when the same piece of legislation or issue is debated in each house. This absence of direct comparisons in turn limits our ability to examine whether factors that appear to shape legislative activity in one chamber, such as gender, party, or seniority, apply equally in the other.

This paper seeks to overcome this challenge by examining how elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and appointed Members of the House of Lords (known as peers) at the British Parliament engage in a legislative activity that is equally open to parliamentarians of both types, namely participation in all-party groups (APGs). APGs are informal legislative bodies that are created and established by legislators to exchange information or take collective action on a particular policy issue. The number of APGs has been rising in recent years in legislatures worldwide, but so far have attracted only limited academic attention, much of which has been focused on the United States (e.g. Hammond 1998; Ringe, Victor, and Carmen 2013). As of yet, no statistical analysis has been conducted of the factors shaping APG participation by unelected parliamentarians.

As part of a broader research project on APGs in Westminster systems, this paper conducts a statistical analysis of APG participation by MPs and peers from 1996 to 2014. It shows that MPs are generally much more active in APGs than their colleagues, suggesting that the need to engage with and signal to constituents and stakeholders drives elected parliamentarians to become involved with APGs even though they face greater demands on their unelected counterparts. In addition, the results reveal that APG participation is shaped by several factors that are unique to the members of each chamber, such as electoral vulnerability (MPs) or frequency of attendance and prior service as an MP (peers). However, despite these differences,

this paper also demonstrates that there are several factors, such as affiliation, gender, time in office, and serving in a front-bench role, that have largely the same impact on APG participation by MPs as they do on peers. Together these results suggest that the behaviour of appointed and unelected parliamentarians is often influenced by many of the same factors, meaning that the need for re-election and the pressures of constituency service many play less of a role in political behaviour than is at times assumed.

2 General background to APGs

APGs are informal organizations that MPs from several parties form in order to pursue common interests on particular issues.² As described by Norton, they involve “members coming together on a basis of shared interests or backgrounds, independent of party” (2008, 240). The number of APGs has grown sharply in recent years in legislatures worldwide (Ringe, Victor, and Carmen 2013). As shown in Figure 1, this trend includes the UK, where the number of groups more than doubled from 243 to 609 between 1996 and 2014.

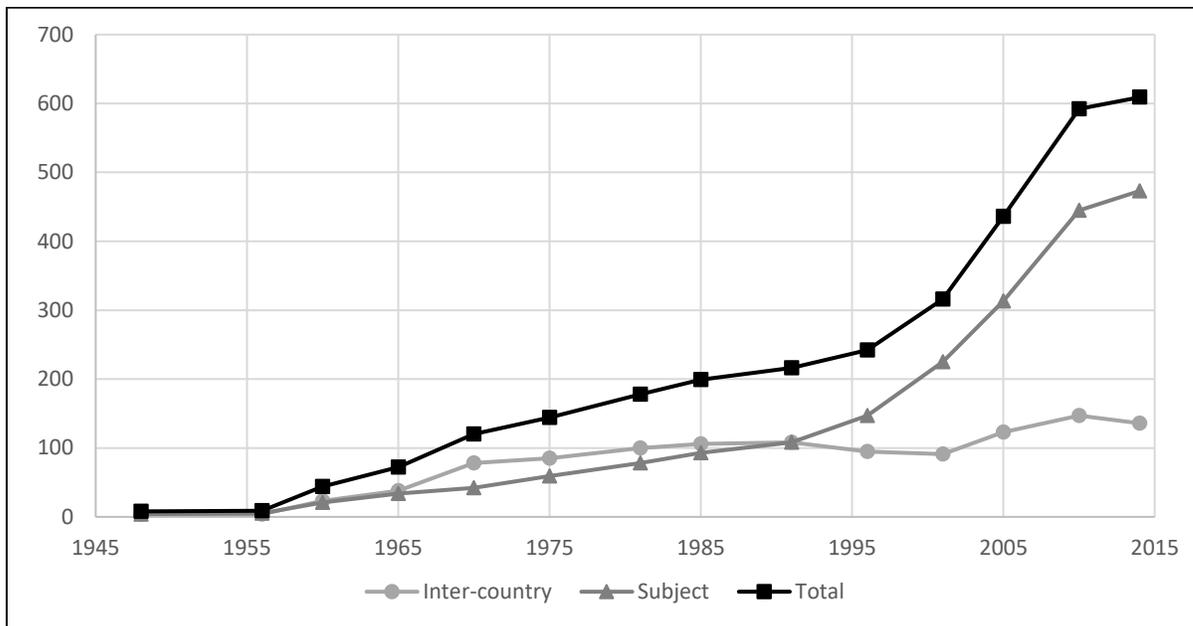
The issues addressed by these groups are highly diverse, with British APGs existing on topics including America, Beer, Cancer, Women in Enterprise, Yorkshire, and Zoos and Aquariums. However, APGs generally fall into two broad categories: *inter-country groups* that focus on relations with other countries, and *subject groups* those dealing with a given issue or industry. While they may have written constitutions, APGs are informal in that they have no official role in parliamentary decision making (Hammond, 1998). Moreover, while the areas they address may overlap, APGs are independent from both official parliamentary committees and internal party caucuses. They also typically exclude cabinet members, making them largely independent from the executive as well.

APGs are active in each of the three core functions performed by legislatures (representation, legislation and scrutiny). APGs often meet with relevant stakeholders and then advance their concerns in parliamentary proceedings. Some APGs also undertake studies of particular issues to see if improvements can be made to government policies. A case in point is the APG on Autism, which has published a series of reports investigating the support offered to those with the

² Most APGs in the UK are referred to as “All Party Parliamentary Groups.” However, the more general term APG is employed here to allow for easier comparisons across jurisdictions.

condition (All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism, 2012). APGs may issue statements in response to new government policy initiatives or legislation. Some also attempt to develop and introduce their own legislation via the private members' system.

Figure 1 – Number APGs at the UK Parliament, 1948 – 2014³



The UK possesses a comprehensive system for regulating and monitoring APGs. Since 1988 APPGs wishing to appear on the list of “Approved” groups needed to be open to members of both the Commons and the Lords, hold annual elections for officers, and provided adequate notice for meetings. Groups were also required to have at least 10 “qualifying members,” including five from the governing party and five from the opposition (United Kingdom. House of Commons. Public Information Office, 1996). However, while groups had to be open to members of both Houses was no *requirement* for representation from both the Commons and the Lords. In 1998 the registry was made publicly available, and 2000 it was placed online. The number of qualifying members required was also expanded from 10 to 20, with half still needing to come from each of the government and the opposition (United Kingdom. House of Commons, 2005a).

³ Sources: For years 1948 to 1975, see Morgan (1979); for years 1981 to 2014 see United Kingdom, House of Commons (1981a, 1981b, 1985a, 1985b, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2005, United Kingdom. Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards 2010, 2014).

After several years of ongoing concern regarding the links between APGs and external lobbyists, in late 2011 the Speakers of the Commons and the Lords established a Joint Working Group to examine the funding and operation of APGs (United Kingdom. Parliament, 2011b). The resulting report was then referred to the House of Commons Committee on Standards, which in turn issued its own recommendations. Among other things, these included the elimination of the requirement for groups to have qualifying members. The change was based on the concern noted by the Speakers' Working Group that many parliamentarians were qualifying members for far more APGs than they could reasonably be involved in, thereby eroding the accountability such members were supposed to offer (Straw et al., 2012). In their place, the committee recommended doubling the minimum number of group officers from two to four. The Commons approved the Standards Committee's recommendations in May 2014, with most of the new rules taking effect after the 2015 election (Barron, 2014).

Notably, the ethical concerns in 2011 that prompted the Speakers' Working Group also led to a change in the rules for APGs that required each group's "registered contact" to be an MP. The rationale was that the registry was administered by the Commons, and so the contact should be someone under the authority of that Chamber. However, the change did not in any way limit the participation of peers within APG activities.

3 Data and methods

To explore the factors shaping parliamentarians' participation in APGs, datasets were created that tracked both the general APG membership and executive posts held by both MPs and peers over several parliamentary sessions. These data were then combined with information on each parliamentarian's demographic background, electoral performance, and leadership positions to allow for an analysis of the individual characteristics and circumstances that shape group membership. Differences in the nature of the Lords and Commons means that each dataset and subsequent analysis included somewhat different information. However, while partially limiting the comparability of results, in the end these differences allow the analysis to shed light on a wider range of theoretical questions.

The following sections first describe data employed, the variables analysed, and the methods used before presenting the results obtained. These findings indicate that there are a range of

characteristics and performance factors that are correlated with parliamentarians' participation in APGs.

3.1 Data availability

Obtaining the data used in the analysis was challenging. While the register of APPGs maintained by the House of Commons includes information on the vast majority of groups in operation, the parliamentary authorities only maintain copies of the registry for the past five years. Thankfully older registries were found on the Internet Archive (www.archive.org) and the UK Web Archive (www.webarchive.org.uk), making it possible to extend the study back for five parliaments, starting with 1992-1997.

The number of APGs in operation rises during the time between elections as new groups are created and since existing groups may take some time to re-register. As such the data were extracted from the last registry available in each session before the next general election. However, while group executives have always been disclosed, the parliamentary authorities only began to publicly post lists of group members in 2004, and even then the list was limited to the 20 "qualifying members" required for registration. In the end, *membership* data for British APGs were available for 2005, 2010 and 2014, and *executive* data were obtained for those years as well as 1996 and 2001. Webscraping software was used to extract the data from the registries into a format suitable for analysis.

Before moving on, some limitations to the data should be acknowledged. As noted above, while some APGs had more than the 20 qualifying members, many others struggled to meet this threshold. As a result, parliamentarians often agreed to join an APG without intending to be active, while some APGs went so far as to list parliamentarians as group members without their knowledge. Given these realities it is possible that the information from the APG registries may not reflect parliamentarians' true engagement with APGs.

Unfortunately, the sheer volume of information makes it impossible to verify parliamentarians' actual level of engagement in each group or their personal reasons for joining. Indeed, there were 8,803 executive posts held by MPs alone between 1996 and 2014, and a further 25,481 group memberships held by MPs between 2005 and 2014. As such, it will be assumed that the data are roughly representative of parliamentarians' true levels of engagement. Moreover, even those

who are not active in the APGs to which they belong may have joined as a way of signalling to their constituents or outside stakeholders, making such engagement analytically relevant.

3.2 Variable selection

As described above, past research from other jurisdictions suggests that legislators' participation in APGs by is shaped by their electoral performance and the desire of new members to develop and demonstrate leadership potential. Moreover, the literature indicates that there are different incentives for those who serve as APG leaders versus those who join as regular members, and that the factors shaping participation may be different for inter-country versus subject groups. The combination of these potential factors and the available data produces six dependent variables, namely the number of membership and executive positions held in inter-country APGs, subject APGs, and in both types combined.

In terms of the independent variables, each regression includes dummy variables to capture gender, major party affiliation (Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat), and to identify those holding leadership positions in the cabinet or shadow cabinet. Given that some MPs and particularly peers hold office for very long periods, measuring time served solely in years may miss the learning curve that parliamentarians experience in the initial period after entering the role. As such, for both MPs and peers time served is operationalized using a dummy variable identifying those legislators in their first terms.

Several independent variables were also included to capture the unique factors shaping the behaviour of MPs or peers that the other may not face. MPs' electoral performance is operationalized using margin of victory as a percentage of votes cast. For peers, attendance is operationalized as a percentage of session days attended. Dummy variables are also included to identify hereditary peers those peers who were appointed after serving as MPs.

3.3 Analytical methods

The dependent variables used in this study are all *counts* of the number of APGs that parliamentarians belonged to at different points in time. This reality has important implications for the statistical analysis given that count data are not normally distributed, and therefore cannot be subjected to standard linear regression techniques. The situation is further complicated by the fact that most of the dependent variables also violate the expectations of the Poisson distribution,

which is typically used for the study of count data. Specifically, the Poisson distribution assumes that a variable's mean will be equal to its variance. Instead, all of the dependent variables employed are "overdispersed," with variances that exceed their means (Hilbe 2011). As such, negative binomial regressions, which account for this overdispersion, are used.

A further complication emerges from the time period covered by the study. All of the dependent variables for legislators' participation in APGs were measured at multiple points in time. Since many parliamentarians, and particularly members of the Lords, are present for multiple sessions of Parliament, they consequently appear more than once in the dataset. This repetition is unavoidable, and is actually advantageous since makes it possible to explore how parliamentarians' engagement with APGs changes as they spend more time in office or their electoral fortunes shift. However, the presence of repeated measures of the same individual also violates assumptions regarding the independence of each observation in a dataset (Hilbe 2011).

This problem can be overcome either through the use of a longitudinal regression model or the application robust variance estimators. Longitudinal models are structured to capture both the variation that happens at each time period and the variation that happens between them. However, the nature of the data used in this study is such that "fixed-effects" longitudinal models would be required.⁴ While such models are useful for specifying the impact of variables that change with time, such as margin of victory, they specifically omit characteristics of each case that do not change, such as gender or party. Given the importance of such factors to this study, robust variance estimators were employed instead. This method controls for repeated measures of the same individual by considering each case as a single observation that receives its own summary variance estimator (Hilbe 2011). Ringe et al. (2013) also employed negative binomial regression with robust variance estimators in their analysis of all-party groups at the US Congress and the European Parliament.

A further difficulty with the data was the large number of peers who did not attend the meetings of the House of Lords at all. This reality reflects the fact that many peers were given the position as a recognition of meritorious service to the country or community, and so did not intend to serve as parliamentarians. Prior to 1996, there were also many hereditary peers who had the right

⁴ Hausman tests indicated that random-effects longitudinal negative binomial models would not be reliable for models with the majority of the dependent variables used in the study.

to sit in the Lords by virtue of their titles, but chose not to do so. In addition, before 2011 no mechanism existed allowing peers to retire, meaning that some officially remained members despite either wishing to end their involvement or being physically unable to continue. Together the substantial number of inactive peers both substantially lowered the average level of engagement with APGs, and also greatly increased the seeming impact of attendance on APG participation. Consequently, the decision was made to include only those peers who had attended at least one day in the parliamentary session being examined. Tables 1 and 2 provide breakdown of the peers who remain in the analysis after the non-attendees were dropped.

Table 1 – Number of peers attending at least one sitting of the House of Lords per session examined, by type, 1996 – 2014

	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014
Life peers	337	494	517	539	641
Hereditary	428	91	90	90	86
Bishops	22	23	22	25	25
Judicial	22	24	18	7	11
Total	809	632	647	661	763

Table 2 – Number of peers attending at least one sitting of the House of Lords per session examined, by party group, 1996 – 2014

	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014
Conservative	395	217	200	179	220
Labour	106	186	193	204	211
Lib Dem	48	62	69	73	97
Crossbench	231	137	153	164	177
Bishop	22	23	22	25	25
Other	1	6	6	8	10
Non-affiliated	0	1	4	8	23
Total	809	632	647	661	763

4 Membership trends and regression results for MPs

Tables 3 and 4 present an overview of the average numbers of APG and executive posts and memberships held by British MPs, and how they vary both over time and with the different factors mentioned above. The negative binomial regression results in Table 5 then indicate which

of the apparent trends in APG participation are statistically significant, and also how involvement varies with margin of victory.

Before considering such variations in participation, however, it is first helpful to examine the data on MP involvement in APGs contained in the bottom two rows of Tables 3 and 4. The figures in the former demonstrate that not only has the number of groups risen in recent years, but the proportion of MPs holding at least one executive position has also grown remarkably, jumping from 54 percent in 1996, to 70 percent in 2005, to 82 percent in 2014. This growth indicates that the expansion of APG activity at Westminster has not been driven solely by a small number of MPs who form ever more groups, but rather is broadly based, with more MPs becoming involved in APGs as the number of groups rises. At the same time, the figures also show that this participation growth at the executive level is exclusively driven by the rising number of members involved with subject groups. Therefore not only has the number of inter-country groups stagnated in Britain over the past few parliamentary sessions, but so too has the proportion of MPs who hold executive positions in these groups, suggesting they are failing to expand their appeal to more members.

By comparison, the figures in Table 3 show that engagement at the qualifying member level has remained consistently high in recent years, with marginal increases taking the proportion holding a membership in a least one group from 92 percent in 2005 to 96 percent in 2014. The contrast between this consistency and the rapid growth seen at the executive level indicates that British MPs have not moved directly from no participation in APGs to engagement at the executive level, but rather gradually deepened their involvement over time. However, the gap in the proportion of MPs involved with inter-country and subject groups can be seen at the level of qualifying memberships as well. While virtually all MPs who are members of inter-country groups are also members of subject groups, the reverse is not true and the gap has widened over time.

Table 3 – Variation in the average number of APG executive posts held by British MPs, by group type, demographic, party, and career factors

	Average executive posts in inter-country APGs					Average executive posts in subject-focused APGs					Average executive posts in all APGs				
	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014
All MPs	0.65	0.59	0.75	0.91	0.87	0.85	1.43	2.00	2.69	2.99	1.50	2.03	2.75	3.60	3.86
Returning	0.76	0.76	0.78	0.97	1.04	0.86	1.17	2.06	2.78	2.55	1.62	1.93	2.84	3.75	3.59
First-term	0.25	0.35	0.51	0.66	0.57	0.80	1.83	1.67	2.31	3.75	1.05	2.17	2.18	2.97	4.32
Male	0.67	0.63	0.83	0.99	0.96	0.82	1.43	2.01	2.72	2.87	1.49	2.06	2.84	3.72	3.84
Female	0.29	0.38	0.41	0.47	0.47	1.02	1.36	1.88	2.48	3.10	1.31	1.74	2.29	2.95	3.57
Conservative	0.64	0.81	1.04	1.19	0.93	0.74	1.56	2.14	2.77	2.77	1.38	2.36	3.18	3.96	3.70
Labour	0.65	0.47	0.62	0.75	0.86	0.82	1.19	1.69	2.29	2.78	1.47	1.66	2.31	3.04	3.64
Lib Dem	0.76	0.81	1.04	0.81	0.44	2.28	3.11	3.87	5.00	4.56	3.04	3.91	4.91	5.81	5.00
Cabinet member	0.09	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.25	0.00	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.04	0.09	0.21	0.21	0.14	0.29
Gov. minister (incl. cabinet)	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.22	0.04	0.07	0.09	0.20	0.81	0.08	0.13	0.14	0.28	1.03
Shadow cabinet member	0.15	0.24	0.39	0.40	0.14	0.23	0.29	1.00	1.52	0.64	0.38	0.52	1.39	1.92	0.77
Shadow minister (incl. shadow cabinet)	0.40	0.63	0.81	0.90	0.58	0.84	1.42	1.99	2.68	2.93	1.07	2.06	2.61	3.07	2.74
<i>Total groups</i>	95	91	122	147	136	147	225	321	446	473	242	316	443	593	609
<i>Total posts</i>	413	386	495	569	553	544	930	1301	1710	1902	957	1316	1796	2279	2455
<i># MPs holding</i>	189	183	228	233	229	279	357	424	436	488	349	403	463	466	527
<i>% of MPs holding</i>	29%	28%	35%	36%	35%	43%	54%	64%	67%	76%	54%	61%	70%	72%	82%

Table 4 – Variation in the average number of APG qualifying memberships held by British MPs, by group type, demographic, party, and career factors

	Average memberships in inter-country APGs			Average memberships in subject-focused APGs			Average memberships in all APGs		
	2005	2010	2014	2005	2010	2014	2005	2010	2014
All MPs	3.05	3.51	2.68	8.29	11.10	11.54	11.34	14.61	14.22
Returning	3.27	3.90	3.15	8.65	11.71	10.94	11.92	15.61	14.09
First-term	1.71	1.88	1.87	6.03	8.56	12.58	7.74	10.45	14.45
Male	3.24	3.72	2.96	8.25	11.07	11.09	11.50	14.78	14.05
Female	2.13	2.32	1.45	8.33	10.50	12.14	10.46	12.82	13.58
Conservative	4.52	4.44	2.75	11.09	12.43	9.90	15.61	16.88	12.66
Labour	2.51	3.23	2.82	6.86	10.26	12.66	9.37	13.49	15.48
Lib Dem	2.96	2.35	1.30	11.78	13.25	14.00	14.74	15.60	15.30
Cabinet	0.11	0.24	0.29	0.42	1.43	1.04	0.53	1.67	1.33
Gov. minister	0.62	1.09	0.34	2.48	4.30	2.65	3.10	5.40	2.99
Shadow cabinet	2.14	3.32	0.27	7.21	9.68	4.82	9.36	13.00	5.09
Shadow minister	4.07	3.69	1.59	10.58	10.77	10.87	14.65	14.46	12.46
<i>Total memberships</i>	1990	2200	1698	5407	7001	7365	7397	9201	9063
<i># MPs holding</i>	431	436	403	596	603	610	608	608	619
<i>% of MPs holding</i>	65%	67%	62%	90%	93%	94%	92%	94%	96%

Looking down the columns of Tables 3 and 4, in most cases returning MPs are more active than those in their first terms as both general and executive members. The only exceptions are in those years that follow a change in government, namely 2001 (after the 1997 Labour victory) and 2014 (after the 2010 Conservative-Liberal Democrat victory). In these years, new MPs have a higher than average number of executive positions for both subject groups and in all groups combined. While records were not available for 2001, the same trend is evident in the member-level data for subject groups from 2014. This post-election change suggests that the new members are filling posts left vacant by defeated or retired legislators from the old governing party, and indeed, several of the external APG sponsors interviewed as part of the broader research project spoke of the need to recruit such new parliamentarians if those involved prior to the election failed to return.

Table 5 – Negative binomial regression analysis of factors shaping British MPs’ participation in APGs

	Executive posts held			Memberships held		
	Total	Inter-country	Subject	Total	Inter-country	Subject
	Coef. (SE)					
Ln margin of victory	-0.0960**** (0.0224)	0.0104 (0.0431)	-0.1347**** (0.0234)	-0.0878**** (0.0227)	0.0057 (0.0371)	-0.1165**** (0.0228)
First term	-0.2063**** (0.0473)	-0.7515**** (0.0940)	-0.0449 (0.0502)	-0.2737**** (0.0500)	-0.7656**** (0.0881)	-0.1735**** (0.0505)
Female	0.0449 (0.0544)	-0.4522**** (0.1020)	0.1741*** (0.0577)	0.0334 (0.0533)	-0.3634**** (0.0905)	0.1148** (0.0528)
Cons.	0.4541**** (0.1337)	0.6452*** (0.2119)	0.3835**** (0.1349)	0.6830**** (0.1386)	0.8068**** (0.1947)	0.6558**** (0.1418)
Labour	0.2397* (0.1310)	0.2908 (0.2086)	0.2412* (0.1324)	0.5407**** (0.1363)	0.5210*** (0.1923)	0.5424**** (0.1385)
Lib Dem	0.8126**** (0.1423)	0.3761 (0.2322)	0.9354**** (0.1463)	0.6180**** (0.1476)	0.1400 (0.2236)	0.7252**** (0.1504)
Government minister	-2.2194**** (0.1313)	-2.3007**** (0.1734)	-2.2009**** (0.1526)	-1.3403**** (0.0736)	-1.6227**** (0.1291)	-1.2728**** (0.0735)
Shadow cabinet	-1.1601**** (0.1390)	-1.3394**** (0.2168)	-1.0900**** (0.1626)	-0.5460**** (0.1233)	-0.7449*** (0.2411)	-0.4871**** (0.1127)
Intercept	1.0929**** (0.1438)	-0.3537 (0.2256)	0.8077**** (0.1460)	2.4182**** (0.1474)	0.8633**** (0.2095)	2.1864**** (0.1487)
# of obs.	3239	3239	3239	1936	1936	1936
# of MPs	1387	1387	1387	1031	1031	1031
Log pseudo-likelihood	-6587.02	-3490.48	-5748.44	-6780.21	-4098.51	-6308.31
Ln(alpha)	-0.0611 (0.0445)	0.8117 (0.0664)	-0.0355 (0.0501)	-0.3706 (0.0408)	0.3565 (0.0490)	-0.3900 (0.0448)
Alpha	0.9408 (0.0419)	2.2517 (0.1496)	0.9652 (0.0483)	0.6904 (0.0282)	1.4283 (0.0699)	0.6771 (0.0304)

* P = 0.1, ** P = 0.05, *** P = 0.01, **** P = 0.001

The regression results confirm that newly elected British MPs are significantly less likely to participate in APGs than those who have served at least one term. Moreover, with the exception of involvement in subject group executives, this relationship between career stage and participation is equally robust at both the general member and executive levels (P=0.001), and also appears to be unaffected by the surge in APG activity among new members following changes in government. These findings suggest that instead of providing new MPs with an opportunity to develop or display leadership skills in search of a promotion, APGs in the UK instead provide some benefit for those further along in their career paths. The regression results

also confirm that serving as a government minister (at any rank) or as a shadow cabinet member significantly reduced all forms of participation in APGs, although data tables indicate that the effect was much greater for the former than the latter. However, junior shadow ministers (i.e. those holding shadow portfolios but who are not part the shadow cabinet) had APG participation rates that were close to those of the average MP.

In terms of the impact of gender on APG activity, Tables 3 and 4 show remarkably consistent patterns, with women MPs simultaneously being significantly less involved in inter-country groups and more involved in subject groups in each of the five parliamentary sessions at both the qualifying member and executive level. However, the findings also show that these effects cancel each other out if women's participation in APGs is considered as a whole, underscoring the importance of disaggregating analyses of APG activity by group type. One respondent from the broader research project suggested that women's reduced participation in inter-country groups likely resulted from their greater family responsibilities, which hindered their ability to travel (confidential interview, May 2013). However, it remains unclear why women should simultaneously also be more involved in subject groups. It is possible that the increased subject group activity stemmed from the fact that women MPs in the UK tend to have lower margins of victory on average, and so may have been more engaged with APGs as a means to connect with and signal to their constituents.

Curiously, the pattern of APG engagement among Liberal Democrat MPs is similar to that among women, with Tables 3 and 4 revealing that they too having below average participation as members of inter-country groups, but above the average involvement in subject-focused groups at both the general member and executive levels. Moreover, this pattern persisted even after the party became part of the coalition government in 2010. In contrast, Conservatives held a greater than average number of memberships and executive posts in both geographic and subject groups during their years in opposition (1997-2010), but were somewhat below average when in government in 1996 and again in 2014. Though less pronounced, a similar pattern can be seen among Labour MPs, who had a substantially lower than average number of executive and membership posts when in government, but were much closer to the average, if not slightly above, when in opposition.

Strangely, the regression results indicated that Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat MPs were *all* significantly more likely to hold memberships in subject APGs relative to those from other parties. Conservative and Labour MPs were also more likely to hold memberships in inter-country groups as well. This finding reveals that those from the other parties at Westminster (primarily the Northern Irish parties and the nationalist parties from Scotland and Wales) were substantially less involved in APGs relative to their larger counterparts – a reality confirmed in the broader dataset.⁵ However, the relationship between party and APG activity was weaker at the executive level, with only Conservative MPs being significantly more likely to hold executive positions in *both* subject and inter-country groups. By comparison, the relationship between Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs and executive positions was significant only for subject groups, and even then the result for Labour was significant only at P=0.1.

While Hammond's (1998) study of APGs at the US Congress found that participation decreased with conservatism, these findings indicate that the opposite is true in Britain. Particularly unexpected is Conservative MPs' consistently greater involvement in inter-country APGs, which would appear to be at odds with the party's traditional euro-skeptic image. Respondents to the broader research project, however, were generally not surprised. When asked what might explain this international focus, they replied that the trend likely reflected the greater interest in foreign affairs among Conservative parliamentarians relative to those from Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who tended to be more concerned with social policy issues. Indeed, respondents stressed that Liberal Democrats lacked safe seats, and so tended to be elected on the back of extensive advocacy work in their constituencies, leaving them little capacity to spare for inter-country APGs. Moreover, the inter-country groups themselves were also described as being more focused on developing business links, which again was seen to appeal more to Conservative MPs.

Finally the regression results also indicate participation in APGs by British MPs is inversely related to their margin of victory. As such, electorally vulnerable MPs are more likely to participate in APG activities, presumably in the hopes of building support amongst constituents. However, the relationship exists only for subject-focused groups, with memberships and executive posts in inter-country groups being unrelated to electoral success. This finding would

⁵ Sinn Fein MPs were excluded from the analysis since they do not actually take their parliamentary seats.

generally be consistent with the varying participation patterns between the parties described above: electorally marginal MPs, like most Liberal Democrats, tend to view subject groups as a way to signal to and connect with their constituents, while seeing inter-country APGs as either an unaffordable drain on their time.

Overall, the results indicate that a wide range of factors shape how British parliamentarians participate in APGs, with rates of engagement varying significantly based on individual characteristics like gender, party, and time in office, as well as performance factors like margin of victory and leadership positions held. Moreover, the data reveal that British MPs' involvement in inter-country groups is influenced by somewhat different factors than their involvement in subject groups. This can be seen in the differences in how margin of victory, gender, and party affiliation affect participation in the two types of groups. As such, examining both types of APGs together could cause certain relationships to go unobserved. In particular, the tendencies for female MPs to be less active in inter-country groups and more active in subject ones cancel each other out when looking at APG activity as a whole. At the same time, there were surprisingly fewer differences between the results for the executive and general membership levels, with the regression results showing just two instances where a relationship observed at one level was completely absent at the other (participation by first-term MPs in subject groups, and Labour MPs in inter-country groups). However, the variation does grow larger if one also considers changes in the significance of the relationships observed.

5 Membership trends and regression results for peers

Tables 6 and 7 present an overview of the average number of APG executive posts and memberships held by British peers who attended at least one day during the five sessions examined. They also present how such participation varied both over time and with a range of demographic and political factors. The negative binomial regression results in Table 8 then indicate which of the apparent trends in APG participation are statistically significant.

As with MPs, Tables 6 and 7 reveal that peers' engagement with APGs has grown dramatically over the period studied, both in absolute terms and also when considering the proportion of peers active in APG activities. While literally every APG has participation from MPs, the bottom rows of Tables 6 show this has not been the case for members of the Lords. Instead, in 1996 just 41 percent of inter-country APGs and 55 percent of subject groups had at least one peer on their

Table 6 – Variation in the average number of APG executive posts held by Members of the House of Lords attending at least one day in the session, by group type, demographic, party, and career factors

	Average executive posts in inter-country APGs					Average executive posts in subject-focused APGs					Average executive posts in all APGs				
	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014	1996	2001	2005	2010	2014
All peers	0.07	0.15	0.28	0.43	0.39	0.16	0.29	0.48	0.83	0.84	0.22	0.44	0.75	1.27	1.23
First term	0.03	0.14	0.16	0.35	0.16	0.12	0.25	0.27	0.53	0.47	0.15	0.39	0.44	0.88	0.62
Returning	0.07	0.15	0.30	0.45	0.46	0.16	0.32	0.52	0.90	0.95	0.24	0.47	0.82	1.36	1.41
Male	0.07	0.15	0.26	0.43	0.40	0.14	0.25	0.40	0.70	0.67	0.21	0.40	0.66	1.12	1.07
Female	0.06	0.15	0.34	0.46	0.36	0.34	0.53	0.81	1.35	1.36	0.40	0.68	1.15	1.81	1.72
Conservative	0.05	0.16	0.26	0.28	0.26	0.10	0.25	0.41	0.64	0.43	0.16	0.41	0.67	0.92	0.70
Labour	0.18	0.17	0.34	0.50	0.40	0.39	0.35	0.63	0.97	1.03	0.57	0.52	0.97	1.48	1.43
Lib Dem	0.06	0.18	0.35	0.82	0.70	0.31	0.50	0.77	1.41	1.42	0.38	0.68	1.12	2.23	2.12
Crossbench	0.04	0.12	0.20	0.41	0.38	0.12	0.23	0.31	0.77	0.93	0.16	0.36	0.50	1.18	1.31
Other	0.00	0.17	1.17	0.75	1.00	0.00	0.17	0.33	0.50	0.70	0.00	0.33	1.50	1.25	1.70
Non-affiliated	N/A	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.39	N/A	1.00	0.25	0.25	0.65	N/A	1.00	0.25	0.38	1.04
Gov spokes.	0.00	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.09	0.17	0.11
Opp. spokes	0.05	0.10	0.15	0.14	0.13	0.53	0.26	0.58	1.64	0.68	0.58	0.35	0.73	1.79	0.81
Life	0.09	0.14	0.29	0.45	0.41	0.21	0.28	0.48	0.85	0.90	0.29	0.41	0.77	1.31	1.32
Hereditary	0.06	0.30	0.31	0.48	0.36	0.13	0.54	0.64	0.98	0.70	0.18	0.84	0.96	1.46	1.06
Bishop	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.00	0.05	0.08	0.08	0.14	0.00	0.05	0.08	0.08
Former MP	0.17	0.31	0.47	0.86	0.91	0.30	0.37	0.58	1.01	1.02	0.47	0.67	1.05	1.86	1.93
New to Parliament	0.05	0.10	0.21	0.29	0.23	0.14	0.27	0.44	0.77	0.78	0.19	0.37	0.65	1.06	1.01
<i>Groups with peers</i>	39	34	90	118	115	81	146	189	295	325	120	180	279	413	440
<i>% of total groups</i>	41.1%	37.4%	73.8%	80.3%	84.6%	55.1%	64.9%	58.9%	66.1%	68.7%	49.6%	57.0%	63.0%	69.6%	72.2%
<i>Total posts</i>	53	95	178	287	297	127	186	308	550	639	180	281	486	837	936
<i># peers holding</i>	29	63	89	115	112	97	125	173	259	292	109	161	222	305	326
<i>% of peers</i>	3.6%	10.0%	13.8%	17.4%	14.7%	12.0%	19.8%	26.7%	39.2%	38.3%	13.5%	25.5%	34.3%	46.1%	42.7%

Table 7 – Variation in the average number of APG qualifying memberships held by Members of the House of Lords, by group type, demographic, party, and career factors

	Average memberships in inter-country APGs			Average memberships in subject-focused APGs			Average memberships in all APGs		
	2005	2010	2014	2005	2010	2014	2005	2010	2014
All Peeres	0.63	1.04	1.08	1.33	2.50	3.00	1.96	3.54	4.08
First-term	0.37	0.77	0.34	0.68	1.47	1.54	1.05	2.24	1.88
Returning	0.68	1.10	1.30	1.46	2.73	3.45	2.14	3.83	4.75
Male	0.58	1.00	1.09	1.16	2.20	2.54	1.73	3.20	3.62
Female	0.85	1.19	1.03	2.09	3.64	4.49	2.94	4.83	5.53
Conservative	0.60	0.78	0.79	1.50	2.44	2.28	2.09	3.21	3.07
Labour	0.88	1.50	1.33	1.72	3.33	3.94	2.59	4.83	5.27
Lib Dem	0.65	1.79	1.97	1.84	3.42	4.95	2.49	5.22	6.92
Crossbench	0.42	0.59	0.70	0.59	1.60	2.31	1.02	2.18	3.01
Other	1.50	1.50	2.30	1.17	0.88	1.20	2.67	2.38	3.50
Non-affiliated	0.00	0.38	1.26	0.50	1.63	2.17	0.50	2.00	3.43
Life	0.66	1.11	1.15	1.38	2.61	3.18	2.03	3.72	4.33
Hereditary	0.76	1.02	0.98	1.61	2.66	2.85	2.37	3.68	3.83
Bishop	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.16	0.28	0.14	0.16	0.28
Former MP	1.02	1.89	2.31	1.79	3.34	3.73	2.80	5.23	6.03
New to Parliament	0.50	0.75	0.70	1.18	2.21	2.78	1.67	2.96	3.48
Gov spokesperson	0.18	0.54	0.41	0.55	1.63	1.19	0.73	2.17	1.59
Opp. spokesperson	0.45	0.50	0.58	2.03	3.89	3.45	2.48	4.39	4.03
<i>Groups with peer</i>	107	134	132	224	364	400	331	498	532
<i>% of groups</i>	87.7%	91.2%	97.1%	69.8%	81.6%	84.6%	74.7%	84.0%	87.4%
<i>Total memberships</i>	407	688	821	860	1651	2291	1266	2339	3112
<i># peers holding</i>	173	203	231	335	449	519	377	478	550
<i>% of peers holding</i>	16.5%	20.3%	17.3%	34.6%	55.1%	52.4%	51.2%	75.3%	69.7%

executives, producing an overall inclusion rate of just 50 percent. By 2014, however, the overall rate had jumped to 72 percent, even though there were now hundreds more APGs for peers to join. A similar trend is also evident in Table 7, with the proportion of APGs with at least one peer as a qualifying member rising from 75 percent in 2005 to 87 percent in 2014. This rise suggests that the increased activity and influence of the House of Lords documented by Russell (2013) extends not only to formal legislative arenas, but to informal ones as well. Indeed, while peers held just 180 or 12 percent of the 1,496 total executive posts across of the APGs that were operating at the British Parliament in 1996. By 2014 this figure had risen to 936 of 3,391 or 27

percent. Therefore while MPs are still the dominant players, peers are shouldering an increasing share of the burden of operating APGs, and thus have almost certainly enable the number of groups to grow larger than if APG participation was limited solely to MPs.

Curiously, however, the pattern of peer engagement with inter-country and subject groups has actually reversed over time, with the presence of peers on inter-country group executives rising to 85 percent by 2014, compared to just 69 percent for subject groups. The same pattern is also evident at the membership level, with 97 percent of inter-country APGs having at least one peer as a qualifying member in 2014 versus just 85 percent of subject groups. This trend may reflect the fact that APG growth has been much more rapid among subject-focused APGs, while the number of geographic groups in operation has generally stagnated. However, it may also be that peers, lacking both the pressures of constituency service and the fears that constituents may react negatively to seeing their representatives traveling abroad, have more freedom to pursue their personal interests in international affairs, or their desires for international travel.

In addition to the increase in the proportion of APGs with involvement from peers, the lower rows of Tables 6 and 7 also show that there has been a substantial jump in rate of APG engagement among peers themselves. Between 1996 and 2014 the proportion of peers holding an executive post in at least a single APG more than doubled from just 14 percent to 43 percent. Admittedly, part of this trend at the executive level no doubt results from the exclusion of the hereditary peers and the corresponding reduction in the number of active peers. Nevertheless, the same trend is also evident in among APG memberships, with the proportion of peers serving as a qualifying member for at least one APG rising from 51 to 70 percent between 2005 and 2014. As was the case with MPs, these numbers indicate that the rise the number of groups with involvement from peers has resulted not from a small number of peers joining ever more groups, but rather from more peers choosing to take part. It should be noted that the APG participation rate among peers actually fell from 2010 to 2014 at both the executive and qualifying member levels. However, given that the absolute number of peers engaged with APGs continued to rise on both measures, this decline in the participation rate would appear to result from the sharp increase in the number of peers appointed during Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition from 2010 to 2015. Specifically, this surge in new peers inflated the total number against which participation statistics were calculated, leading to an apparent drop.

Table 8 – Negative binomial regression analysis of factors shaping Members of the House of Lords participation in APGs

	Executive posts held			Memberships held		
	Total	Inter-country	Subject	Total	Inter-country	Subject
	Coef. (SE)					
First term	-0.6756**** (0.0935)	-0.6276**** (0.1704)	-0.6882**** (0.0928)	-0.7386**** (0.0966)	-0.8131**** (0.1673)	-0.7131**** (0.0990)
Female	0.6275**** (0.0831)	0.2524 (0.1551)	0.7436**** (0.0834)	0.5247**** (0.0697)	0.2407* (0.1288)	0.6008**** (0.0693)
Labour	-0.0359 (0.1021)	-0.0979 (0.1865)	0.0390 (0.1035)	0.3965**** (0.0904)	0.3795** (0.1630)	0.4295**** (0.0911)
Cons.	-0.5582**** (0.1039)	-0.4890*** (0.1905)	-0.5481**** (0.1054)	0.0414 (0.0912)	-0.0775 (0.1748)	0.1207 (0.0935)
Lib Dem	0.1970** (0.1124)	-0.0363 (0.1997)	0.3138*** (0.1147)	0.4960**** (0.1037)	0.4066** (0.1857)	0.5500**** (0.1038)
Government minister	-2.3895**** (0.4320)	-1.4765** (0.6653)	-3.0383**** (0.4984)	-0.9053**** (0.2749)	-0.8842** (0.4505)	-0.9181**** (0.2311)
Shadow cabinet	-0.1863 (0.1604)	-1.0741**** (0.3308)	0.0550 (0.1585)	-0.2246* (0.1150)	-0.7918**** (0.2426)	-0.0820 (0.1157)
Hereditary	0.1138 (0.1032)	0.2959 (0.2073)	0.0609 (0.0982)	0.3748**** (0.1110)	0.5581*** (0.2137)	0.2960*** (0.1146)
Former MP	0.6804**** (0.0901)	1.1739**** (0.1506)	0.3936**** (0.0858)	0.5520**** (0.0736)	1.0016**** (0.1292)	0.3476**** (0.0683)
Attendance	0.0276**** (0.0014)	0.0308**** (0.0028)	0.0256**** (0.0014)	0.0219**** (0.0012)	0.0270**** (0.0024)	0.0198**** (0.0012)
Intercept	-2.2334**** (0.1055)	-3.6915**** (0.2263)	-2.4756**** (0.1118)	-0.8117**** (0.0872)	-2.5352**** (0.1896)	-0.9822**** (0.0886)
# of obs.	3512	3512	3512	2070	2070	2070
# of peers	1479	1479	1479	965	965	965
Log pseudo-likelihood	-3553.1237	-1681.656	-2901.1888	-4286.397	-2209.0965	-3795.2884
Ln(alpha)	0.4887 (0.0646)	1.7329 (0.0974)	0.2530 (0.0837)	0.0157 (0.0516)	1.1211 (0.0746)	-0.0623 (0.0593)
Alpha	1.6302 (0.1053)	5.6570 (0.5512)	1.2879 (0.1078)	1.0159 (0.0525)	3.0683 (0.2288)	0.9396 (0.0557)

Turning to variations in average rates of APG involvement, the data in Tables 6 and 7 and the regression results in Table 8 suggest that those demographic and political factors present among *both* MPs and peers – including time in office, gender, party, and serving in a front-bench post – tend to have largely the same impact on levels of APG participation among the members of both chambers, although with some notable differences. For time in office, those peers in their first

term of service are less likely to be engaged in all forms of APG activity than those who have served at least one term or more. These trends, which are shown to be highly significant in Table 8, mirror those in the Commons, but is even more pronounced, lacking the reversals that followed the changes in government in the 1997 and 2010 elections. Such consistency suggests that the limited rates of all-party group participation among new parliamentarians is more reflective of the time required to learn about the role of APGs rather than any deliberative effort among new members to avoid cross-party cooperation for the sake of party unity and possible promotion to the front bench.

Peers also showed largely the same relationship between gender and APG participation that was evident among MPs, with women members of the House of Lords being significantly more likely to be involved with subject APGs at both executive officers and qualifying members. However, while female MPs were also less likely to be involved with inter-country groups, female peers showed no particular aversion to inter-country APGs, and even moderately more likely than men to be qualifying members. Therefore while the preference toward subject APGs and avoidance of inter-country APGs among female MPs meant there was no significant overall trend between gender and APG participation, the overall relationship was in fact significant for female peers. The consistency of the preference for subject-focused groups among both female MPs and peers suggests that women legislators may in fact be more interested in the kinds of issues they address. That said, more detailed study is required to confirm whether women are indeed drawn towards APGs that operate on the kind of health or social policy issues that are traditionally seen as being of greater interest to female politicians. The cooperative nature of APGs as tools for policy advocacy may also be in keeping with the more consensual and less confrontational approaches to politics that female politicians are said to prefer. At the same time, the greater engagement in inter-country APGs among female peers suggests that the factors that may be inhibiting such activity among female MPs, such as family responsibilities or serving in more marginal constituencies, have less impact on the behaviour of female peers.

The relationship between partisan affiliation and APG involvement had perhaps the greatest divergence across Commons and the Lords. Most notably, while Conservative MPs were more significantly more likely to be engaged in all aspects of APG activity, their counterparts in the Lords were significantly less likely to hold any APG executive posts. There was also no

relationship between Conservative affiliation and serving as a qualifying member. By comparison, the pattern of engagement among Labour and especially Liberal Democrat peers was generally consistent to that displayed by the colleagues in the Commons. In particular, both Liberal Democrat MPs and peers had by far the highest average level of participation in subject APGs as both officers and qualifying members, but were considerably less active inter-country APGs. These results suggest that Liberal Democrat and Labour parliamentarians share more of a common desire to engage with policy issues through APGs, no matter in which chamber they might serve. Conversely, Conservative parliamentarians appear to need more of an incentive for consistency service before they choose to become involved. For their part, crossbench peers tended to be more active than Conservatives but less active than those from Labour or the Liberal Democrats.

Finally, few surprises are generated by the impact of serving in a front bench role on either the government or opposition side. Consistent with the results for MPs, those holding a government front-bench post in the Lords were significantly less likely to engage with both types of APGs as either an officer or a qualifying member. However, while shadow front-bench members showed a similar pattern in the raw data in Table 6 and 7, the relationships were only significant for involvement in inter-country groups.

The last part of the analysis relates to those factors shaping participation that are unique to peers. Looking at APG participation among different types of peers, the Bishops have by far the lowest average level of APG engagement. This finding is not unexpected given that the Bishops, having full-time work elsewhere, are less likely to be regular attendees. More surprising though is inconsistent pattern of all-party group involvement between life and hereditary peers. From 2001 to 2010, hereditary peers actually held more executive posts on average than their appointed colleagues in both subject and inter-country APGs, with the reverse trend evident in 1996 and 2014. Conversely, no clear pattern was evident at the qualifying member level. However, the regression results surprisingly showed no significant difference in APG participation among hereditary versus non-hereditary peers in terms of executive posts, but did find that hereditary members were significantly more involved as qualifying members. Further study is needed to unpack these results, as the executive results may be skewed by the inclusion of data from prior to the exclusion of most hereditary peers in 1999.

In contrast to the inconsistent impact of peerage type, the remaining two peer-specific factors, percent of session days attended and prior service as an MP, both significantly increased all aspects of APG participation. The impact of attendance on APG participation would appear very straightforward, with those peers who attend more regularly presumably being more likely to look for ways to engage in with policy debates. Moreover, those with higher rates of attendance are presumably more likely to be invited to join APGs by outside campaigning groups. In much the same way, former MPs who are appointed to the Lords tend to be more active in its work than those without a political background. They also are already aware of the work performed by APGs, and may utilize group activities as a way to remain connected to their former colleagues in the Commons

6 Conclusion

The results presented here indicate that while there are several chamber-specific factors that influence how MPs and Peers engage with APGs, there are also several commonalities as well. Average rates of APG participation is lower among both MPs and Peers in their first terms, as well as those that hold front bench positions for both the government and the opposition. Conversely women parliamentarians in both the Commons and the Lords tend to be more active in subject-focused APGs than their male counterparts. Likewise, Liberal Democrat and to a lesser extent Labour parliamentarians also have a greater tendency to be involved in subject APGs regardless of whether they serve in Parliament's upper or lower house. In contrast, Conservative parliamentarians stand out for having strongly different engagement with APGs among MPs as compared to peers. While Conservative MPs are significantly more likely than the average MP to take part in all forms of APG activity, Conservative Peers are significantly less likely to hold any executive positions and have no significant relationship either positive or negative at the qualifying member level.

Together these results help us to identify those influences on legislative behaviour that remain consistent despite the different environments and incentives encountered by elected versus unelected parliamentarians. Some factors, lower participation among new members, would appear to be fairly straightforward, relating to the common experience encountered by all those

who must learn the many aspects of a new workplace. In contrast, the largely consistent impact of gender across both MPs and Peers help to reinforce the past observations that women politicians have different priorities or wish to engage in politics in a different fashion than their male colleagues.

At the same time, the results of this study also have implications for the study of political behaviour in each chamber as well. In particular, the finding that participation in subject-focused APGs declines as MPs' margins of victory grow suggests both that the groups are used as a way to signal to constituents, and also that MPs with higher margins of victory may be less responsive to constituent demands. Conversely, the much higher rates of APG participation among former MPs serving in the Lords indicates that the patterns of participation within the chamber may change over time if the number of former MPs being named as peers continues to remain high.

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