

PRESS RELEASE: 30 November 2020

Boomers are Threatening Younger Generation's Political Representation

The Baby-Boomer generation is now firmly in control of much of British politics according to new research released by the Intergenerational Foundation (www.if.org.uk) today which investigates the ageing of British political representatives.

While the median age of the general population was 40 in 2019, the median age of members of the House of Commons elected at last year's general election was 51, and the median age of members of the House of Lords rose by more than a decade between the 1979 and 2019 elections, from 60 to 72.

The current Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, born in 1980, may belong to the Millennial generation, but 70% of current members of parliament (MPs), are between the ages of 40 and 59 and a whopping 86% of members of the House of Lords are now over the age of 60.

The research compares changes in political representation over time by age, gender and ethnicity at the local, national and international scales, and found that while good progress has been made on gender representation (women now make up 33% of MPs), and ethnicity (10% of MPs now come from ethnic minority backgrounds), virtually no progress has been made in increasing the share of MPs who belong to younger age groups.

Angus Hanton, IF Co-founder, comments, "Political representation by gender and race has improved, but age has still not been addressed. If Sweden, Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands have been able to better represent the interests of younger generations, so too should the UK."

Hanton continues, "Younger generations need political representatives that understand the pressures they face, and that will be increasingly important in a post-COVID financial settlement between the generations. With two-thirds of those MPs declaring an income from rental properties now over the age of 50, it may be all too tempting for them to vote in their own interests rather than to help the young, in this case to gain more affordable housing."

Newly elected MPs tend to be younger than MPs as a whole, yet at every election since 1979 there have been more newly elected MPs who are aged over 50 than 18–29 years of age. More recent elections have also seen more over-60s elected than 18–29 year-olds, firmly cementing the Boomer generation at the heart of political representation. In fact, 18–29 year-olds currently account for 15% of the entire population but have just 17 MPs of this age group representing them, equivalent to 3% of all MPs.

A similar pattern has also emerged for local councillors, with a median age of 59 compared to the population median age of 39/40.

David Kingman, author of the report concludes, "While there are now 80 Millennial MPs compared to only one in the 2005 General Election, age itself has become a strong predictor of the political attitudes which people hold, and with the ageing of our political representatives there are real concerns that younger generations' interests may be increasingly ignored. If current patterns continue, Millennials could have to wait another 10 or 20 years before they become the dominant force in the House of Commons."

The report recommends that political parties should: make greater efforts to increase the proportion of their MPs who belong to younger age groups; introduce age quotas for local councils to ensure the voices of younger generations are heard; and address the structural barriers that prevent young people from playing a more active role in local and national political representation. And finally, all political bodies should collect and publish more detailed data on the personal characteristics of elected members, including by age.

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Note to Editors:

Data taken from:

- Parliamentary Data Platform Members API
- House of Commons Register of Members' Financial Interests
- ONS Population Estimates
- EveryPolitician
- UN Population Prospects

For further information or to arrange an interview with Angus Hanton, IF Co-founder, please contact: Liz Emerson on Mob: 07971 228823 Email: liz@if.org.uk