

# DE-MYSTIFYING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

## THE HOUSE OF LORDS IN TRANSITION

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
921AA Doctor of Philosophy in Government

University of Canberra  
Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis

April 2016

# Abstract

This thesis evaluates the role of ideas in the reform of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom. A multi-dimensional theoretical approach has been devised which integrates Parsons' (2003; 2002) concept of the cross-cutting idea, Hirschman's (1991) reactionary theses, and Streeck and Thelen's (2005) typology of gradual transformative change. This theoretical approach was applied to primary data gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with a representative sample of 77 members of the House of Lords in late 2012 and early 2013. The data from these interviews has been supplemented, where necessary, with documentary analysis of secondary sources.

Two key empirical findings emerge from the research. First, changes in the House of Lords in the period since 1997 have often been caused by factors other than direct legislation. For example the types of people appointed to the House of Lords since the election of the Blair government in 1997 have affected the culture and work of the Lords in significant ways. Second, the positions adopted by peers towards Lords' reform are not as materially driven as has been claimed. This thesis provides evidence for the conclusion that ideas about British democracy and government, and the role of the House of Lords within the governance of Britain, are of central importance to the positions taken by peers; more important than their position within the House of Lords itself.

Building on these findings, this thesis demonstrates that the influence of ideas on continuity and change in the House of Lords is more complex than is evident in the existing literature. Both incremental cultural changes within the Lords, and critical importance of ideas are

shown to be fundamental to understanding reform. These findings provide a clearer understanding of how the House of Lords could, and should, be reformed in the future.

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# Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to acknowledge the peers who agreed to be interviewed as part of my research. Without their participation this project would not have been possible. The kindness and generosity showed to me during the interview period made this project not only possible, but very enjoyable. I would also like to thank Anne Evans for being my British-‘grandmother’ during my time in the United Kingdom. Anne made me feel at home in London, and her support during that period will never be forgotten.

To Dr Phil Larkin and Professor David Marsh, my panel members, I owe immense gratitude. Phil has been supporting me since supervising my honours dissertation, and was a most amiable host during parts of my time in London. Dave has been such an asset to me during the last three years. Many thanks are also due to Professor Gerry Stoker who throughout the course of my candidature has been an invaluable source of advice, and to Lorna Evans who was so instrumental to my completing. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the following Australian-based academics that have provided advice and kindly read and commented on various drafts of chapters over the years – Dr Kerry Baker, Professor Linda Botterill, Dr Selen Ercan, and Dr Paul Fawcett.

Of all my academic supporters I would like to thank most Professor Mark Evans. If it was not for Mark’s ongoing support I would never have been able to complete this thesis. Mark provided me with so many opportunities which made my time as a PhD student immensely rewarding and enjoyable. To Mark I owe so very much, and to him I will be forever grateful.

My final thanks go to my incomparably supportive family – to Mary, Dad, Alison and Michael. To my partner, Mitiana, your love and understanding during the final stages of my



thesis enabled me to keep on going. Now that it is finished I hope to be much less difficult!  
Of all though thanks must be given particularly to my unfailingly amazing mother! Not only  
do I owe this thesis to Mum, but everything I have in my life. My gratitude to her is beyond  
that which words can express. All I can say is – I completed the thesis Mum!