



Nick Clegg

BRITISH POLITICIAN

WRITTEN BY: [Peter Kellner](#)

Alternative Title: [Nicholas Peter William Clegg](#)

Nick Clegg, in full **Nicholas Peter William Clegg**, (born January 7, 1967, [Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire](#), England), British politician who served as leader of the [Liberal Democrats](#) (2007–15) and as deputy [prime minister](#) of the United Kingdom (2010–15).



Clegg, who had a Dutch mother and a half-Russian father (whose aristocratic mother fled to [Britain](#) after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution), grew up bilingual, speaking English and Dutch; he later became fluent in French, German, and Spanish. He was educated at [Westminster School](#), London, and he studied anthropology (M.A., 1989) at the [University of Cambridge](#), political philosophy (1989–90) at the [University of Minnesota](#), and European affairs (M.A., 1992) at the College of Europe in [Brugge](#), Belgium. He traveled extensively and worked at various jobs in Germany, Austria, Finland, the United States, Belgium, and Hungary.

In 1994, having briefly tried his hand at journalism, Clegg became an official at the [European Commission](#) in Brussels, where he progressed to become adviser to Sir Leon Brittan, a [European Union](#) (EU) commissioner and a cabinet minister in [Margaret Thatcher's Conservative](#) government. Clegg helped negotiate the admission of China to the [World Trade Organization](#), in addition to aiding [Russia](#) in its bid for membership. Brittan regarded his young adviser as one of the brightest future politicians of his generation and urged him to pursue a career as a Conservative member of Parliament (MP). [Clegg](#), however, felt that the Liberal Democrats far better reflected his own internationalist outlook. In 1999 he was elected as a Liberal Democrat member of the [European Parliament](#).

Widely tipped as a future party leader, Clegg paved the way by leaving the [European Parliament](#) in 2004 and winning a seat in the 2005 British general election as MP for Hallam, a suburb of [Sheffield](#). In January 2006, when [Charles Kennedy](#) resigned as leader of the Liberal Democrats, Clegg felt that he was too new to [Parliament](#) to stand for leader and thus backed 63-year-old Sir [Menzies Campbell](#), who appointed Clegg as the party spokesman on home affairs. He quickly made his mark as an eloquent critic of the [Labour](#) government's curbs on [civil liberties](#). Less than two years later Campbell resigned, amid media criticism that he was too old to lead the party into a general election. This time Clegg decided to seek the leadership. On December 18, 2007, he defeated Chris Huhne, age 53, by a margin of just 511 votes in the balloting of more than 41,000 party members. In turn, Clegg named Huhne his replacement as spokesman on home affairs.

After taking office, Clegg sought to streamline the Liberal Democrats' process of [decision making](#) and policy formulation; previous leaders had expressed frustration because they were required to consult members more widely



the three main British parties. In the lead-up to the May 2010 [general election](#), Clegg's popularity surged, particularly because of his widely praised performances in Britain's first-ever televised party-leader debates; in some polls the Liberal Democrats challenged the Conservatives for first place. In the event, however, the Liberal Democrats finished a disappointing third and won 57 seats, a loss of five from the 2005 election. Clegg, however, was a key figure in the subsequent negotiations as both the Conservative and Labour parties—neither of which had secured a majority—sought to form a [coalition government](#). The Liberal Democrats ultimately joined the Conservatives in a coalition government with [David Cameron](#) as prime minister and Clegg as deputy prime minister.

Clegg and Cameron seemed to develop an easy [rapport](#), partly because of their similar backgrounds and shared age (both were 43 upon ascent to governing). Moreover, their parties were quick in negotiating the compromises necessary to govern together. The deficit-reduction program rolled out by the government in June and [enhanced](#) in October called for deep spending cuts that proved extremely unpopular with Liberal Democrat voters, resulting in the party's worst showing since the merger of Liberal and Social Democratic parties in local council elections in [England](#) in May 2011. Although there were scattered calls for Clegg's resignation as leader, support for him within the party in general remained strong. Already disgruntled over the government's raising of university tuition in December—an action the party had opposed during the 2010 election campaign—many Liberal Democrats were upset at the Conservatives' active opposition to the referendum to replace the first-past-the-post [electoral system](#) with the [alternative vote](#), which had been put forward by the Liberal Democrats and was soundly rejected by British voters. In the wake of those developments, the Cameron-Clegg partnership continued on noticeably more businesslike footing.

It grew tenser in July 2012 after the government's failure to engineer the transformation of the [House of Lords](#) into a more democratic chamber, which had been a priority for the Liberal Democrats. Rebellious Conservatives joined Labour in stifling a bill that proposed shifting the partly appointed, partly hereditary body to one with 80 percent of its members elected to single 15-year terms and 20 percent appointed. Frustrated by Cameron's failure to marshal enough Conservative support to ensure that the bill became law, Clegg retaliated by withdrawing the Liberal Democrats' support for a Conservative-advocated [constitutional](#) measure to reduce the number of members of the [House of Commons](#) from 650 to 600.

In local elections held in much of the U.K. in May 2013, both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats lost considerable ground to the [United Kingdom Independence Party](#) (UKIP), which argued for British withdrawal from the EU. The rising tide of [Euroskepticism](#) among a significant portion of the British electorate had even greater consequences for the internationalist Clegg a year later, when the Liberal Democrats not only foundered badly in May 2014 elections for local councils but fell from 11 seats to 1 in elections to the European Parliament that were won by the UKIP. Again, some Liberal Democrats called for Clegg's replacement as party leader.

In September 2014, with voting on a referendum on independence for Scotland just days off, Clegg joined Cameron and [Labour Party](#) leader [Ed Miliband](#) in jointly publishing a “vow” to increase powers for Scotland's government if the referendum were rejected—as it was, with about 55 percent of those Scots who voted spurning independence.

The U.K. general election in May 2015 proved disastrous for the Liberal Democrats and for Clegg. Although Clegg held on to his seat, he was one of only eight Liberal Democrats who did, as the party watched its representation in Parliament fall from 57 seats to 8. The support that the Liberal Democrats lost went to candidates from both the Labour and Conservative parties, the last of which won an overall majority and would no longer need the participation of its former coalition partners to rule. On May 8, the day after the election, Clegg announced his resignation as party leader. Two months later he was succeeded by [Tim Farron](#). Clegg failed to maintain his seat in the House of Commons in the June 2017 general election.

Peter Kellner

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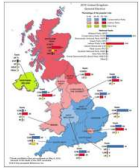


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