

All political parties are the same. Discuss.



Politics is filled with vague, vacuous statements that sound good, provoke a reaction and yet contain no real substance and fail to communicate anything.

The words on the left, map the most frequently used words by the three main parties in every manifesto since 1945. The top ten words from all parties over the last 60 years are: new, local, national, work, industry, tax, economic, services, support and education.

What the information on the left shows is how the language used by the parties has become more similar over time. If you look at the words used in 1945 compared to 2010 there were clear differences in priorities between the manifestos. Today there is consensus, well at least in how the parties communicate their messages.

The public often perceive very little between the parties but it is important that the differences stand out because there are of course fundamental differences between them. It is vital that they communicate these differences.

We can't go on like this. A voting system fair for all.

Electoral Reform

There has been a lot of discussion over the last few months over electoral reform but the idea isn't new. Labour promised electoral reform in their 1997 manifesto, the Jenkins Commission recommended changing to a new system called Alternative Vote Plus. However, nothing resulted of the commission, the issue was raised again by Gordon Brown in the run up to this years general election.

It is easy to be sceptical and see this as an issue raised by parties when they are seeking power who then reject it when they don't want to relinquish power. However, there is real benefit to reform. Look at the figures on the right and see how the percentage of the votes compares to seat distribution. Or worse look at the map which represents the number of votes cast for the winning MP in each constituency. No member got over 45%, some as low as 18% and the average is around 22%.

Alternative voting systems offer a fairer system, taking into account all parties. Arguments against these systems often bemoan a lack of strong governments or minority parties having too much power but strong governments just lead to elected dictatorships. Coalition reflects that the public have a variety of views, no party ever has such a mandate that they would deserve an outright majority.

It is somewhat indicative of the skewed electoral system that in 2005 the difference between the Conservative and Labour party, by the popular vote, was 3% but Labour had 157 more MPs. This year the difference in the popular vote was 7% in favour of the Tories, yet they only managed 49 more MPs than Labour. In fact, the Tories actually have a higher percentage than Labour when Labour had a strong working majority.

Under our current system, a nation of 45 million voters will leave it to a quarter of a million in the marginals to decide the outcome of the next election. It's the equivalent of letting only people who live in Brighton decide the government of the United Kingdom. – Willie Sullivan



What would change?

These figures show the proportion of votes and the number of seats each of the major parties would receive in a variety of voting systems. Transparency of colour is used to show the proportion of seats each number represents.

These results are estimated by the Electoral Reform Society and assume that the votes cast in these elections would have been their first choice. This does not take into account tactical voting and it is likely the share of votes for minority parties, such as the Greens, would be higher. However, these figures do provide a rough overview of what would change.

In addition to the systems described on the left, there are also the results for two other voting systems.

2010 Results				
Number of seats – First Past The Post				
307	258	57	28	
Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Other	
Percentage of votes				
36%	29%	23%	12%	
How the UK could be represented under alternative voting systems (2010)				
Alternative Vote				
281	262	79	28	
Single Transferable Vote				
246	207	162	35	
2005 Results				
Number of seats – First Past The Post				
355	198	62	31	
Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat	Other	
Percentage of votes				
35%	32%	22%	11%	
How the UK could be represented under alternative voting systems (2005)				
Alternative Vote				
366	175	74	31	
Alternative Vote Plus				
307	199	110	30	
Single Transferable Vote				
263	200	147	36	
Regional MMP				
242	208	143	53	
National List PR				
232	213	145	58	

2010 General Election

This map shows the distribution of votes across the United Kingdom in the 2010 General Election. The colours used depict the party or individual who won the seat. The size of the hexagon and transparency are calculated by combining the total number of votes for the winning candidate and the turnout. For example, in William Hague's seat of Richmond, Mr Hague received 62.8% of the vote and the turnout was 67.2%; combining these gives the value of 42%.

This system does not take into account size of majority, or any of the competing individuals, no matter how close they were, to demonstrate how the FPTP system works, winner takes all. The size and intensity of colour get bigger and darker respectively the more democratic the seat is.

You will notice that the Conservative party tend to win seats with either a larger percentage of votes or higher turnout, hence the larger, darker hexagons.

