

## **PR – Devil in the Details – Do Not Be Sold Short**

For Liberals the voting system in the UK has long been a source of concern. How can one believe in “one-man one vote” and then have more than half the electorate disenfranchised by the brutally Darwinian First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) voting system. This may work for horse races, but for democracy it is a disaster.

The two major parties have long equivocated on this issue. They know it is undemocratic and leaves a vast swathe of the electorate unrepresented, but they also know it is the thing that has perpetuated the two-party hegemony.

For a brief shining moment in 2010 the LibDems held the balance of power and their decades-long longing for a fairer system was sacrificed as soon as the tinkling of thirty pieces of silver was heard. As history has subsequently shown, anything and everything was sacrificed for their leader’s greater glory. The highly unpalatable referendum on the odious AV system was a debacle. It was worse than if there had been no vote because the Tories could point to “public rejection of electoral reform” and return to the smugness of the two-party state.

The 2024 election was the first ever where four parties got over 10% of the vote share. Some posited that the British public were already voting as if the UK has a proportional representation system. But they weren’t.... A vast number of MPs were elected on less than 50% of the voters in their constituencies.

Some have been touting the virtues of Additional Member System (AMS) electoral structures. This is a cop-out that partially levels a playing field that is sloping like the decks of the Titanic. The First Class passengers still get the best seats, the riffraff go down with the ship.

Some have pointed to the electoral system used for the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments as a way forward. With the AMS one chooses a constituency candidate and have a second vote for one’s preferred party to represent one regionally.

This allows ticket-splitting as one can cast both votes for the same party or vote for different parties in the constituency and regional ballots. Regional seats are then allocated to parties on a proportional basis, taking into account the constituency MPs each party won.

Everyone else can go whistle. While better than FPTP, it sticks to the outmoded concept of “local MPs”. This is a fallacious argument used by fans of the two (or three or four) parties that end up on top.

The Electoral Reform Society published a note on the broken system in the immediate wake of the July results and in it they mused: “It is important to note from the outset that it is impossible to predict with certainty what electoral results under different voting systems would be. This projection is merely an indication of what the results of this general election – conducted under FPTP – could have looked like using a different electoral system.

It is of course impossible to account for the other changes that would accompany a switch to an alternative electoral system, such as changes in voter behaviour, party campaigning, or the number of parties standing candidates”.

They went on to hypothesise the outcome using AMS: “Our projection shows a result that is more in line with how we voted at the 2024 general election. Based on our projection, the Labour Party is still the largest party, but more in line with their percentage of the vote.

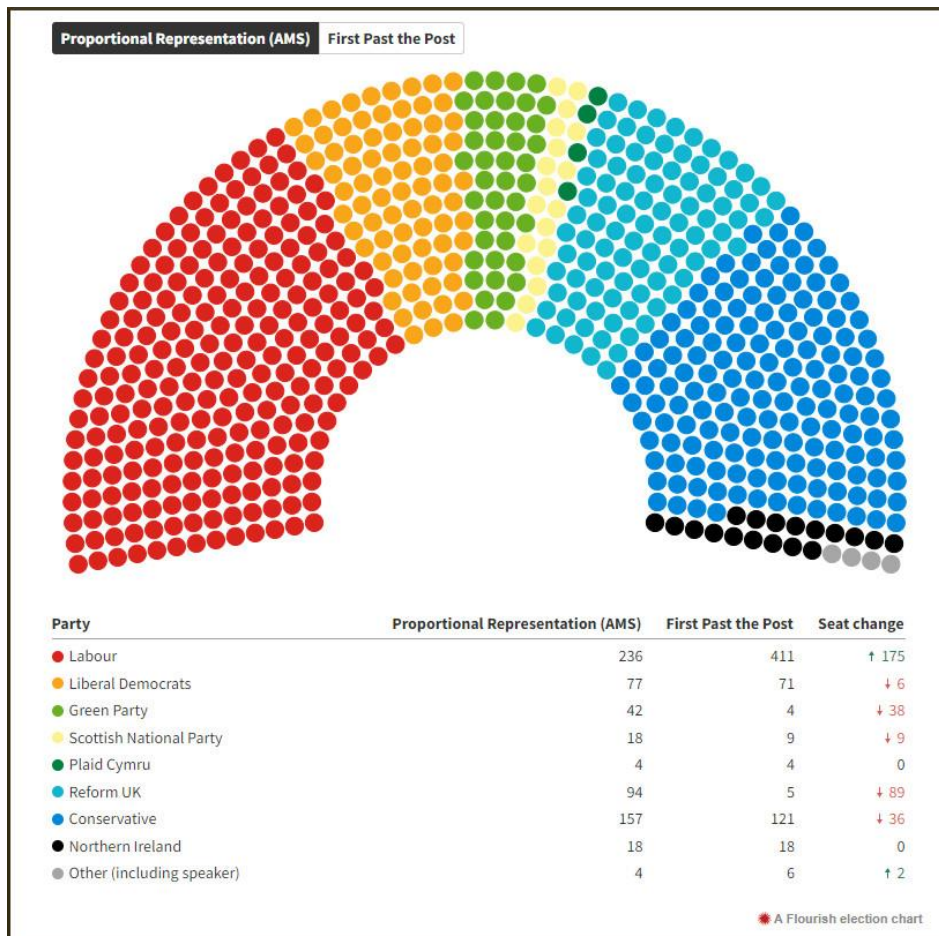


Image remains the property of the Electoral Reform Society - <https://election2024.electoral-reform.org.uk/>

While Labour have fewer seats, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Green Party and Reform UK have shares far closer to their share of the vote”.

These calculations of course do not take into account the parties that received nothing. They also do not consider the changed voting behaviour that would be the result of being offered a choice of candidates that was more in line with the voters’ individual likes or dislikes, such as liberals, far-left and far-right.

### True PR

The type of system we should be angling for should be true proportional representation on a basis of regions. The UK should be split into nine or ten regions, with 5-6 mn people in each. A case could be made for London, with its 8-9mn people being one region and Wales and Northern Ireland with their smaller populations existing as smaller regions. Then PR would be applied.

Such an arrangement could very well deliver The Liberal Party seats in two of the regions, for starters.

### Conclusion

True Liberals should watch out that they are not hornswoggled into some less than ideal new voting system that suits Pseudo-Liberals and removes other viewpoints from consideration. The Pseudos, for all their talk of fairness, would be very happy to turn a two-party state into a three-party state. But as we saw at the last election, they managed to get a disproportionate number of seats without as much as enunciating a single policy, and certainly no liberal policies.

Just as no two parties should be entrenched, thus no three parties should be entrenched. Abolishing constituencies might be seen as retrograde by those enamoured of surgeries etc but how useful are these when there are 70-100,000 residents in each constituencies and those MPs who also have government functions are scantily available for dealing with squabbles that should better be served by local councillors.

At least with regional MPs one could take one's problems to a representative of one's own choosing (and political stripe).

The latest elections showed that the system is more than broken, it is also massively inequitable. No government should be able to win a big majority on a minority of the vote. The First Past The Post system is warping UK politics and denying representation to the vast majority. Under a proportional voting system, seats more closely match votes, so that the Liberal portion of the population can finally get a say and have more impact on what happens in Westminster.

Christopher Ecclestone, August 2024