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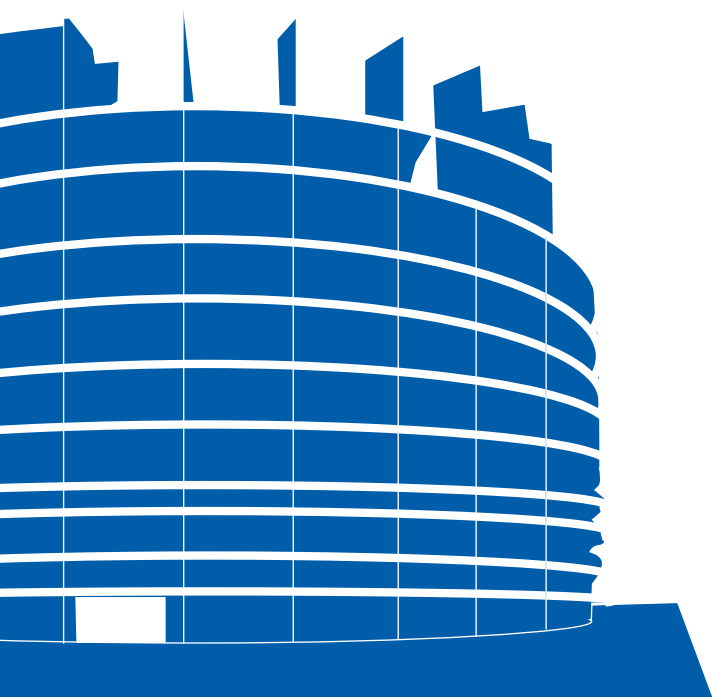
# County and European elections

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5 June 2009

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Report  
and  
Analysis



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- Electoral
  - Reform
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# Executive summary

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- 1.** In the European elections only 43.4 per cent supported either the Conservatives or Labour, the lowest such proportion ever. While this was connected with the political climate over MPs' expenses, it merely continues a long-term trend of decline in the two-party system.
- 2.** Support for Labour was particularly low at only 15.7 per cent.
- 3.** The proportional system used in the European election meant that the votes cast by the electorate were reasonably accurately translated into seats. If First Past The Post (FPTP) had been used, the result would have been extremely unrepresentative of how Britain had voted.
- 4.** However, the closed list Proportional Representation system meant that voters did not have any say over which individual candidates they helped to elect.
- 5.** The regional system also wasted considerable numbers of votes, particularly in the smaller regions.
- 6.** Northern Ireland's Euro election used the Single Transferable Vote (STV), which produced a reasonably proportional result and minimised the number of votes that did not help to elect an MEP.
- 7.** The same trend of minor parties doing well was also found at the county level. However, it made less impact because FPTP vastly over-represented the largest single party, the Conservatives, in most counties.
- 8.** Labour's performance in the county council elections was extremely poor, with areas in which the party polled 25 per cent of the vote being few and far between.
- 9.** Many county councils now have lopsided Conservative majorities that do not reflect the balance of opinion in their areas.
- 10.** This is bad for democracy because of the large number of people whose opinions are not represented, and the lack of effective scrutiny and accountability in council chambers.
- 11.** STV is a suitable electoral system for local government; while under STV the Conservatives would still have won control of many counties, they would at least have had some opposition in the council chamber.



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# Political context

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The run-up to the elections in June 2009 was one of the most unusual and turbulent periods in recent British political history. As late as the end of 2008, after the government won some credit for its handling of the financial crisis and saw off a Scottish National Party (SNP) challenge in the Glenrothes by-election, it appeared that they might not be too bad for Labour. Losses in the county elections were inevitable, given that the previous elections in May 2005 had been on the same day as the general election. While Labour's victory then was unconvincing in terms of vote share, the party was still somewhat down in the polls and would also suffer from differential turnout – Labour voters tend to turn out less in local elections during Labour governments. However, Labour could quietly expect to gain some ground in the European Parliament elections which were last fought in 2004. The party's vote was then at a low ebb, and there was some expectation that the 2004 surge in minor party voting (particularly for the UK Independence Party [UKIP], influenced by Robert Kilroy-Silk's brief adherence to the party) would subside.

Labour slipped back in early 2009 – unsurprisingly given the rapid fall in economic activity that was taking place as the financial crisis started to be felt in the real economy – and the Conservatives re-established a strong lead in the opinion polls. It seemed possible at that stage that 2009 would be a uniformly good year for the Tories, and that they could pick up votes from UKIP, whose potential was underestimated by many commentators. But then the *Daily Telegraph* started publishing details of claims under MPs' allowances since 2005, and the roof fell in so far as the political system was concerned.

The immediate effect of the expenses saga was bad for Labour, because the *Telegraph*

published the details for members of the Cabinet first, and because some of the less defensible cases (such as payments in relation to fully repaid mortgages) involved Labour MPs. The government's response was also less convincing in public relations terms than that of the Conservatives, although the opposition also started to suffer because some of the most florid disclosures – such as moat cleaning and duck housing – involved Tory MPs. Labour took an immediate knock, propelling the party below what had seemed a solid floor of bedrock support in the national polls at around 25 per cent, but the Conservatives also came off the top of their poll ratings and public opinion became extremely fluid and hostile to the political establishment. Pollsters picked up the rise in support for the 'minor' parties during the campaign, with particular attention being paid to the resurrection of the UKIP anti-politics vote and the possibility of the British National Party (BNP) winning seats. As the elections approached, the political climate became ever more heated with the resignation of several Cabinet ministers (notably Hazel Blears just before the polls opened) and intense pressure on Gordon Brown. Labour approached the two rounds of election results (most councils declared on Friday 5 June, while the European results were held over until Sunday 7 June) with trepidation.



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# Electoral systems

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Five electoral systems were used for the various elections of 4 June 2009.

Elections for the European Parliament in Great Britain take place using the **closed regional list Proportional Representation system (list PR)**. Votes are cast for a slate of candidates put forward by a party (independent candidates are treated as a slate of one) and the seats in each region are allocated in proportion to the votes cast (the precise calculation is known as the D'Hondt method). The more seats in a region, the more proportional the result, so that the outcome in South East (10 MEPs) is considerably more proportional than the outcome in North East (3 seats). If a party wins one seat, the person at the top of the list is elected; if two seats, the top two, and so on. The order of the lists is pre-determined by the party and voters are not able to express a preference (or a dislike) for the individuals on the list. Before the 1999 European Parliament elections MEPs were elected in single-member constituencies by First Past The Post (FPTP).

Elections for the European Parliament in Northern Ireland (NI) use the **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** system and have done since direct elections to the European Parliament began in June 1979.

Elections for the English county and unitary councils use a mixture of two systems based on **First Past The Post**, namely strict FPTP in single-member seats (known academically as **Single Member Plurality, SMP**) and multi-member FPTP with voters having as many X-votes as seats available (this is technically known as **Multiple Non-Transferable Vote, MNTV**). Before 2005 the counties were entirely elected from single-member seats. In several areas two-tier local government was abolished in 2009 and elections took place

for new 'unitary' authorities carrying out all local government functions in their areas. In some other areas (Cheshire, Durham and Northumberland) unitary authorities had been elected in 2008 and there were no local elections in 2009.

Elections for directly elected mayors take place using a system called the **Supplementary Vote (SV)**. In this system, voters can cast a first- and second-choice vote. If no candidate has a majority of first-choice votes, then there is a second count in which the top two candidates are pitted against each other. Votes cast for candidates who have been eliminated at this stage are examined, and if their second choice is for one of the candidates still in the race these votes are added to the relevant candidate's total.



# The European Parliament elections

Turnout in the European Parliament election in Great Britain was 34.3 per cent. This was significantly down on the record participation in 2004, when turnout reached 38.9 per cent, aided by all-postal voting in four northern regions plus important local elections in the major urban centres where unassisted Euro election turnout can be very low.

Turnout in Northern Ireland, as in every European election, was higher than in Great Britain, with 42.4 per cent voting this time. The gap, however, was smaller than it has been. Northern Ireland's Euro elections have always used the Single Transferable Vote and this is probably part of the reason for the consistently higher participation, although the main reason historically has been that leading figures like Ian Paisley and John Hume have been their parties' standard-bearers in Europe. Stricter European Parliament rules on dual mandates, and also the easing of tensions following the end of political violence and the formation of an executive in 2007, have probably lessened the impact of European elections in Northern Ireland.

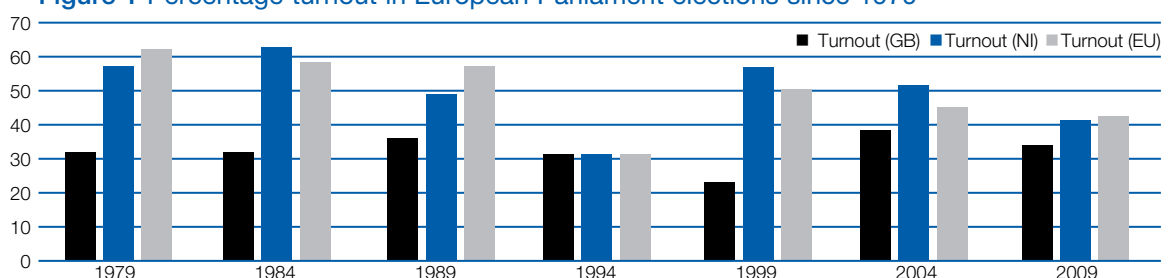
There has been no steady trend in participation in UK European Parliament elections, with fluctuations according to particular circumstances in each year. The average turnout since the introduction of PR in 1999 has been a bit higher than it was under FPTP before then, although higher turnout

in the last two elections was assisted by the decision to move the date for local elections back a month, so that there would be a single election in June rather than two elections in quick succession, as in 1999 and before. Even so, European Parliament elections are the one category of elections where turnout is actually a little up in Britain compared to where it stood in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Turnout across the European Union (EU) as a whole, however, has tended to decline over time, particularly with the accession of eastern European countries, where turnout tends to be low anyway.

By region, the sharpest falls in turnout came in areas where there was all-postal voting in 2004 but not in 2009) and – an overlapping category – areas where there were local government elections in 2004 but not in 2009. Mention might be made of London, where the fall in turnout seems relatively small given that the mayoral election took place in June 2004; mobilisation to defeat (or vote for) the BNP in London after the party won a seat on the Assembly in 2008 may be a partial explanation. Turnout actually rose in two boroughs, Barking & Dagenham where the BNP is strong, and Islington where it decidedly is not, and the Labour share also, unusually, went up in both boroughs in 2009.

**Figure 1** Percentage turnout in European Parliament elections since 1979



**Table 1 Turnout by region in the European Parliament elections 2009**

	Turnout 2009 (%)	Local elections 2009	Turnout 2004 (%)	Local elections 2004	All-postal pilot 2004	Change since 2004 (%)
Eastern England	37.7	Most areas	36.5	Mostly no	No	+1.2
East Midlands	37.1	Most areas	43.7	Mostly no	Yes	-6.6
London	33.3	No	37.3	Yes	No	-4.0
North East	30.4	Very few	41.0	Mixed	Yes	-10.6
North West	31.7	Mostly no	41.1	Mixed	Yes	-9.4
South East	37.5	Most areas	36.6	Mostly no	No	+0.9
South West	38.8	Most areas	37.7	Mostly no	No	+1.1
West Midlands	34.8	Mixed	36.3	Mixed	No	-1.5
Yorkshire/Humber	32.3	Mostly no	42.3	Most areas	Yes	-10.0
Wales	30.4	No	41.4	Yes	No	-11.0
Scotland	28.5	No	30.6	No	No	-2.1
<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-4.6</b>

**Table 2 The European Parliament election results 2009 and 2004**

	European election June 2009				Comparison with 2004		
	Votes	Vote (%)	Seats	Seats (%)	Vote 2004 (%)	Vote change (%)	Seat change <sup>1</sup>
Conservative	4,198,394	27.7	25	36.2	26.7	+1.0	+1
Labour	2,381,760	15.7	13	18.8	22.6	-6.9	-5
Lib Dem	2,080,613	13.7	11	15.9	14.9	-1.2	+1
UKIP	2,498,226	16.5	13	18.8	16.2	+0.3	+1
Green	1,303,745	8.6	2	2.9	6.2	+2.4	
BNP	943,598	6.2	2	2.9	4.9	+1.3	+2
SNP	321,007	2.1	2	2.9	1.4	+0.7	
Plaid Cymru	126,702	0.8	1	1.4	1.0	-0.1	
Eng Dem	279,801	1.8	0		0.7	+1.1	
Christian2	249,493	1.6	0				
Socialist Lab P	173,115	1.1	0				
No2EU	153,236	1.0	0				
22 Others	472,242	2.8	0				

1. Seat changes are with reference to the result as it would have been had the same number of seats been available in 2004. The actual numbers elected in 2004 were 27 Conservative, 19 Labour and 12 Lib Dems; no other parties were affected by the adjustment.  
 (2) Christian Party – Proclaiming Christ’s Lordship; Christian Party – Christian People’s Alliance.



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## Political outcomes

The clearest of the political outcomes of the European election was that it was a nightmarish defeat for **Labour**. The party's national share at 15.7 per cent was almost unbelievably low, and made the miserable 22.6 per cent gained in 2004 look almost respectable. Labour was outpolled in Wales for the first time since 1931, when the National coalition was narrowly ahead. Labour ran sixth in Cornwall, behind the Conservatives, UKIP, the Lib Dems, Greens and Mebyon Kernow, and were behind even in hitherto safe coalfield areas such as North East Derbyshire. It could have been even worse, had the party not been able to mobilise some strong ethnic minority turnout in urban areas such as Leicester, Luton, Manchester and inner London, helped no doubt by the threat of the BNP winning seats.

The clearest winners were the **UK Independence Party**, although their vote only edged up slightly. Their victory was in coming second in the national vote and gaining a seat. A few months out from the elections, the UKIP vote had been expected to fall because it had been inflated by a media boom for the party in 2004, driven by the decision of TV host (and former Labour MP) Robert Kilroy-Silk to stand for UKIP in the East Midlands. Many felt that the UKIP vote in 2004 was unnaturally high and that the subsequent problems of UKIP (Kilroy-Silk left the party before 2004 was over and another MEP was jailed for benefit fraud in 2007) would cause their vote to implode. This was never going to happen because the UKIP had an established brand name as the party to vote for if you didn't like the EU which was bound to revive for a European Parliament election. It was always going to poll respectably and win at least six seats, but the anti-establishment mood engendered by the

expenses saga powered it to a new peak of support.

The rise of UKIP was paralleled by the decline of the **Conservatives** in the campaign period. From being reasonably hopeful of winning a percentage of the vote somewhere in the mid 30s, which would have translated into significant gains of seats, they slid to not far above their relatively poor showing in 2004. Many Conservative supporters felt there was nothing very wrong with voting UKIP in Euro elections, and the longer the expenses saga rolled on, the more Conservative MPs became tainted. While they 'won' the election, and attained the minor milestone of pipping Labour in Wales, this was mainly because of Labour's collapse.

The **Liberal Democrats** polled reasonably, in line with expectations. The party has generally underpolled its national strength in Euro elections. Its strong pro-European policy is not popular with some people, particularly in the South West, who vote for its parliamentary candidates but stay at home or vote UKIP in Euro elections. Its campaigning techniques, which are often about promoting its candidate as an individual, local credentials and pushing for tactical votes, do not work well in list PR elections in large regions.

The **Green Party** posted the largest gain in share of the vote in the election. This was not reflected in seats. In the regions where it already had MEPs, its incumbents were comfortably returned, gaining the fifth seat in both London and South East. The party also came close to electing MEPs in North West (by 4,962 votes, from the BNP), South West (by 12,069, from the Conservatives), Yorkshire & The Humber (by 15,683, from the BNP) and Eastern (by 15,945, from UKIP). It was poorly served by the broad distribution of its support.

The **British National Party** (BNP) won European Parliament seats for the first time, one of the significant outcomes of the 2009 elections. It gained the last seats in two regions, North West and Yorkshire & The Humber. North West had been shaping up as a key contest during the election because the region combined areas of BNP support and a large number of MEPs, making it feasible to get across the threshold for election. Nick Griffin, the party leader, stood in this region. In the Yorkshire region, however, the threshold was higher because the region has fewer MEPs; even so, the BNP's vote was strong enough in the region to hit the target. This was not because of a big surge in the BNP vote; because turnout was lower in the regions that had all-postal voting in 2004, the total vote was lower in 2009. It was more that the general slippage in turnout and support for the larger parties was enough to make the difference between a narrow loss and a narrow win in both regions.

For the nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales the picture was mixed. **Plaid Cymru** underperformed in terms of its expectations, but retained its seat. The **SNP** outpolled Labour by a decisive margin, even though no seats changed hands other than because of the reduction in Scotland's seats from 7 to 6.

'Others' won 8.5 per cent of the British vote. As the party system becomes more fragmented, previously minor parties like UKIP, the Greens and the BNP have become significant forces in Euro elections, and still smaller parties also bid for support. A 'Pensioners Party' won 2.4 per cent of the vote in the South West, and the Christian People's Alliance won 2.9 per cent across London (with over 5 per cent in Newham). The most disappointed among the 'Others' was probably the Jury Team, a coalition of

independents mustered by Sir Paul Judge to press for political reform, which did not take off and polled poorly across the board.

## Closed list PR: the advantages and disadvantages

### Advantage 1: fair representation

The positive side of the list PR election was that the British delegation to the European Parliament was more or less what people asked for when they voted.

The Conservatives, as the largest party, were rather over-represented, while the medium-sized parties (in this election comprising UKIP, Labour and the Liberal Democrats) received about the same (a fraction over) their share of the vote. The smaller but still significant parties contesting the election in multiple regions received rather fewer seats than their share of the vote – this affected the Greens and the BNP in particular, but also four other British or England-only parties that polled 1 per cent or more (English Democrats, Christians, Socialist Labour and No2EU). Each of these received a higher share of the vote than Plaid Cymru, who gained a seat because their vote was naturally concentrated in Wales.

The principal cause of the variation between the seats won by each party and the share of the British vote is the effective threshold established because seats are awarded by region, rather than using Britain as a single electoral unit. If votes cast across Britain as a whole were the basis for the calculation the seats won by each party would have been as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 Model national list PR result, June 2009**

	Seats (GB basis)	Change from regional result
Conservative	21	-4
Labour	12	-1
Lib Dem	10	-1
UKIP	13	0
Green	6	+4
BNP	4	+2
SNP	1	-1
Plaid Cymru	0	-1
Eng Dem	1	+1
Christian	1	+1

A model result for FPTP in the European elections reveals quite how absurd this system would be at translating votes into seats. Table 4 divides each region into single-member constituencies comprising groups of whole local authorities (except in Birmingham, a seat

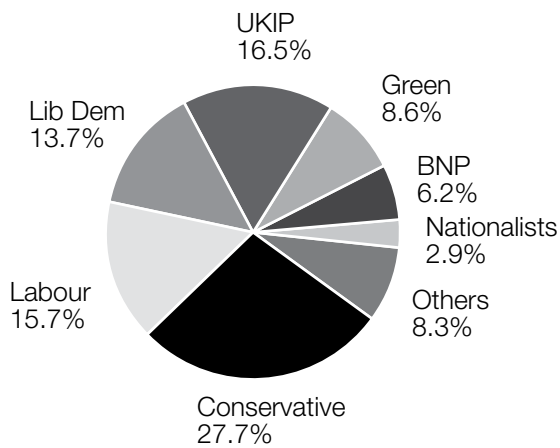
on its own, and County Durham which must be divided) and within an acceptable variance of the average size of electorate. Other model boundary schemes are possible, but would make no significant difference to the outcome. Votes are assumed to have been cast exactly as they were under list PR – a simplifying assumption because the system does affect voting behaviour. FPTP would introduce tactical voting and make people less willing to support ‘minor’ parties because of the risk of ‘wasting’ their votes, and it is not really possible to incorporate these factors into a model.

The FPTP result is extremely anomalous. The most glaring fault is that the party that came second in votes, UKIP, would fail to be first past the post in any single-member constituency, although it would have a number of strong seconds. The Conservatives would win 49 out of 69 seats (71.0 per cent) with 27.7 per cent of the vote, an excessive return by any standards. Labour would win about the same as under regional PR, thanks to concentrations of support in geographically defined areas (notably the big cities). The Lib

**Table 4 Model FPTP result of European Parliament election, June 2009**

	Total	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	UKIP	Nat
Eastern England	7	7	0	0	0	
East Midlands	5	5	0	0	0	
London	8	6	2	0	0	
North East	3	0	2	1	0	
North West	8	5	3	0	0	
South East	10	10	0	0	0	
South West	6	6	0	0	0	
West Midlands	6	4	2	0	0	
Yorkshire/Humber	6	5	1	0	0	
Wales	4	1	2	0	0	1
Scotland	6	0	2	0	0	4
<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

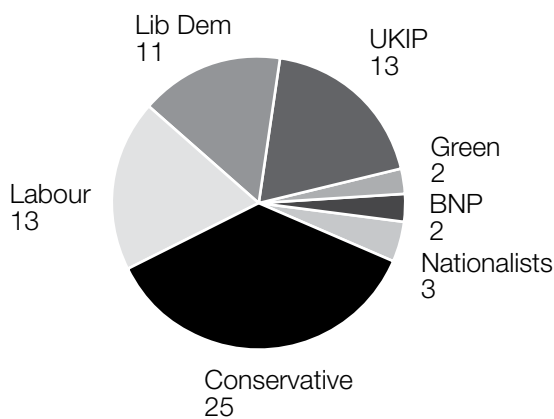
**Figure 2 Percentage vote (GB), June 2009**



Dems, UKIP and the Greens would lose out because of their broad spread of support – and UKIP in particular as it has its strongest votes in areas in which the Conservatives also polled well.

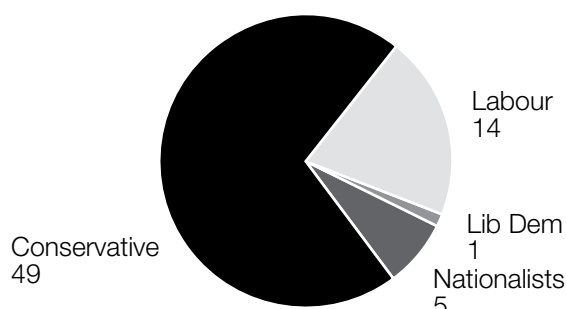
The regional breakdown of the result would also show polarised representation, with the Conservatives sweeping everything in four regions in southern England (South East, South West, Eastern and East Midlands) but being eliminated from North East and Scotland.

**Figure 3 Seats under list PR, June 2009**



Because the national vote was so fragmented, there would be rather few really safe seats, with many seats being won with exceptionally low shares of the vote (in the low to mid 20 per cent range for many of them). In such conditions FPTP can behave very haphazardly, with small shifts in votes causing big shifts in seats.

**Figure 4 Seats under FPTP model result, June 2009**



The result would also, in the political climate of 2009, have been a travesty in representing public opinion. The election was an emphatic rejection of Westminster politics as it has been, with only 43.4 per cent of those voting supporting either Conservative or Labour and 56.6 per cent rejecting the Westminster duopoly. But an FPTP electoral system would translate this strong majority into a measly six seats out of 69 (8.7 per cent) made up of four SNP members, one Plaid Cymru and a lone Liberal Democrat. The onus must be on supporters of FPTP to justify such massive distortions of the popular will.

**Advantage 2: more choice of party**

The electoral system meant that more parties stood a chance of getting elected, and thus promoted more competition and choice of political perspectives for voters. It was worthwhile for small and medium-sized parties

**Table 5 Women candidates in the European Parliament election 2009**

	Women candidates (%)	Women candidates in 'winnable' places	Women candidates	Winnable places (%)	Women 'winnable'
Conservative	22	31.9	10	33	30.3
Labour	34	49.3	16	27	59.3
Lib Dem	20	29.0	9	16	56.3
UKIP	13	18.8	2	20	10.0
Green	29	42.0	7	13	53.8
BNP	11	15.9	1	11	9.1
SNP	1	16.7	1	3	33.3
Plaid Cymru	2	50.0	1	2	50.0

*Note:* Winnable places: top of the list for BNP; top of the list plus second in London and South East for Greens; top three for SNP and top two for Plaid; other four parties as in Table 6. 'Winnable' is self-evidently a classification that will be contested.

to campaign for votes. There was a broad spread of different perspectives on European issues available to choose from.

European Parliament elections have for some time seen British voters more willing to choose unconventional options than other types of election – in 1989 the Green Party won 15 per cent of the vote, a share which is still its national peak. The difference then was that it received no seats despite this large display of public support. The 2004 elections were the first time in any national election that the combined share of Labour and Conservatives had fallen below 50 per cent, albeit only just (49.3 per cent). The 2009 elections plunged way below the threshold, with the combined share falling to 43.4 per cent. In contrast to the rigidity and lack of adaptability of the Westminster system, the European Parliament system has been open to new parties and perspectives. Not all of these reflections of public opinion are attractive, but they are there and they get represented.

### **Advantage 3: gender and ethnic representation**

If parties wish to elect a balanced team of male and female candidates, and also members of the black and minority ethnic communities, list PR is a system that enables them to do it. Parties may adopt conscious strategies such as 'zipping' (alternating men and women down the list) and ensuring that at least one woman occupies a place high enough on the list to expect to be elected.

The 2009 election produced an increase in the proportion of women MEPs elected from Britain. The reason was that in 2004 two large parties sent grossly lopsided delegations to the European Parliament. Caroline Jackson, who stood down at the 2009 election, was the only woman in the outgoing Conservative group (Theresa Villiers was elected in 2004 but stepped down in 2005 when she was elected to the House of Commons). UKIP had no female MEPs among its 12. Both parties

**Table 6** Definition of 'winnable' seats for main parties in Table 5

	Eastern England	East Midlands	London	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorks/ Humber	Wales	Scotland
Con	4	3	4	1	3	5	3	3	3	2	2
Lab	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	3
Lib Dem	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
UKIP	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	1

made some efforts to do better in 2009, with the middle stretches (third and second places) on Conservative lists often going to women. Although UKIP still put very few women in winnable positions on its lists, it did manage to put one woman in a target seat (West Midlands 2) and one in a seat that it was defending (South East 2).

Given that many seats are predictable under list PR, the actual results were close to what might have been anticipated, although Labour's poor performance disproportionately affected women – of the five seats Labour lost compared to 2004 under the new allocation of seats, three had female candidates and

two had male candidates. If Labour had managed to gain some ground rather than losing, the share of seats going to women would have increased by more. As it is, all four main parties did manage to elect a higher proportion of women than in 2004. Perhaps a special mention should be made of Marta Andreasen, a former European Commission accountant, born in Argentina, who became one of UKIP's two women MEPs.

The proportion of women among British MEPs has tended to rise with each election, although there was a blip in 2004 with the emergence of UKIP.

**Table 7** Women MEPs 2009 and 2004

	2009 women MEPs	2009 women MEPs (%)	2004 women MEPs	2004 women MEPs (%)	Change % 2004–09
Conservative	6	24.0	2	7.4	+16.6
Labour	5	38.5	6	31.6	+6.9
Lib Dem	6	54.5	6	50.0	+4.5
UKIP	2	15.4	0	0.0	+15.4
Green	2	100.0	2	100.0	0
BNP	0	0.0	-	-	-
SNP	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Plaid Cymru	1	100.0	1	100.0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>+8.3</b>

**Table 8 Women MEPs elected under FPTP and list PR, 1979–2009**

	Electoral system	Women MEPs (GB)	Total MEPs (GB)	% women MEPs (GB)
1979	FPTP	11	78	14.1
1984	FPTP	12	78	15.4
1989	FPTP	12	78	15.4
1994	FPTP	16	84	19.0
1999	List PR	21	84	25.0
2004	List PR	18	75	24.0
2009	List PR	22	69	31.9

Since the introduction of list PR, European Parliament elections have tended to represent Britain's black and minority ethnic (BME) population better than other elections. In each election since 1999, there have been four BME MEPs. In 2009 the Conservatives elected three: Nirj Deva was returned in South East, Sajjad Karim was elected in the North West as a Conservative having won a seat in 2004 as a Liberal Democrat, and Syed Kamall – who took a London seat when Theresa Villiers stood down in 2005, was re-elected. Labour had one BME MEP, Claude Moraes in London; incumbent Neena Gill lost her seat in the West Midlands. The proportion of BME MEPs from Britain is 5.8 per cent.

**Drawback 1: lack of voter power over candidates**

The European elections also showed some of the disadvantages of closed list PR. The **lack of choice** over individual candidates to be elected sat ill with Britain's tradition of requiring individual candidates to appeal for support from the electors. While MEPs are in general little known, there were voters who were aware of the differences and who resented the requirement to cast a vote for the party slate as a whole rather than being able to exercise

their own judgement regarding the merits of the candidates.

These problems were particularly apparent in 2009, and strengthen the argument for giving voters more power over which MEPs are elected. Pro-European (and One Nation) Conservatives in the South East region, for instance, were displeased with being forced to vote for a list with strong Eurosceptic and anti-NHS candidate Dan Hannan at its head. Similarly, in the South West, Conservative voters were unable to judge (for good or ill) Giles Chichester's breach of the European Parliament rules over his expenses, or Roger Helmer's virulent Euroscepticism and climate change denial in the East Midlands. A Liberal Democrat vote in the West Midlands could not be cast personally for agriculture expert and second on the list Phil Bennion, and could only help the list leader, Liz Lynne. There was no way voters could specifically approve or disapprove of the individual record and priorities of any of the MEPs seeking re-election.

The lack of choice is also apparent when an MEP steps down or dies – the replacement is simply the next person on the list of that party.

There are possible solutions to the problem of a lack of candidate choice. These solutions do not include First Past The Post, which dispenses entirely with choice and gives voters only one candidate, chosen by the party selectorate, from each party. A viable solution would be to design an open list system, so that as well as recording a party vote, electors are able to indicate a preference for one or more individual candidates on the list. Translating these preferences into allocating seats can be a complicated process, but it would be progress compared to closed list PR. Another option would be to use a system that approaches proportionality differently and involves multi-member elections and voting for individual candidates rather than lists, i.e. the Single Transferable Vote.

#### Drawback 2: 'wasted' votes

The 2009 elections, more than those in 1999 and 2004, also showed some of the problems of having **non-transferable votes**. In the

South West region, three Conservatives, two UKIP and one Lib Dem were elected. Labour and the Greens both fell short of getting an MEP. This means that while the two large Eurosceptic parties (Conservative and UKIP) won 52.2 per cent of the votes cast in the region, they had 82.3 per cent of the representation between them. The remaining 47.8 per cent of voters had one MEP between them, Graham Watson of the Lib Dems – Labour and Green together polled 17.0 per cent and had nothing to show for it. Voters for broadly pro-European parties (34.7 per cent if one includes Lib Dem, Labour and Green) were grossly under-represented.

This problem became more apparent in 2009 because of the shrinking number of seats available. The number of MEPs from Great Britain as a whole has fallen from 87 in 1999 to 75 in 2004, and again to 69 in 2009. If there is any further EU enlargement (particularly if a large country such as Turkey or Ukraine gains accession) this will have to fall further to

**Table 9 'Wasted' votes in the European Parliament election 2009**

	Seats	Total 'wasted'	Big six 'wasted'	Other 'wasted'	'Wasted' (%)	Change % since 2004
Eastern England	7	400,020	238,029	161,991	24.9	+5.5
East Midlands	5	297,433	190,258	107,175	24.2	+10.6
London	8	280,214	86,420	193,794	16.0	+3.6
North East	3	221,969	177,481	44,488	37.6	+8.0
North West	8	262,347	127,133	135,214	15.9	-4.8
South East	10	288,130	101,769	186,361	12.3	+3.8
South West	6	472,868	323,784	149,084	30.5	+17.5
West Midlands	6	305,271	210,211	95,060	21.6	+3.6
Yorkshire/Humber	6	200,928	104,456	96,472	16.4	-2.6
Wales	4	186,188	148,356	37,832	27.2	-3.6
Scotland	6	240,820	165,404	75,416	21.8	-1.2
<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>3,156,188</b>	<b>1,873,301</b>	<b>1,282,887</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>+3.4</b>

Note: 'Big six' are votes cast for the six principal parties that did not help elect MEPs – Labour in South West, UKIP in North East, Lib Dem in Wales, Greens except in London and South East and BNP except in Yorkshire & The Humber and North West.



maintain a reasonably sized Parliament. The mean number of candidates elected from a region has fallen from 7.9 in 1999 to 6.8 in 2004 to 6.3 in 2009. Given that there are six parties winning seats in England, the regional list structure of PR is coming under some strain. While no vote is ever really wasted, because voting is a public way of expressing a voter's views, and gives moral support to the candidates and causes thereby supported, one can use the shorthand 'wasted' for votes that do not help to elect candidates.

The fewest unproductive votes were in the three largest regions, South East, London and North West. The small North East region produced the largest proportion, a staggering 37.6 per cent of votes cast for parties that did not win representation. There was a general trend, caused by the continued fragmentation of the party system and smaller seat size, for more 'wasted' votes in 2009. Falls in the 'wastage' rate in Wales, Yorkshire & The Humber and North West reflected parties that were previously unrepresented (UKIP and BNP) winning seats.

One solution would be to either merge the existing 11 regions into larger units (for instance South with 16 seats, Midlands with 11, Yorkshire and North East with 9, and London and North West 8 each as currently). These would be very large and remote electoral districts, and they would also be unable to help matters in Wales or Scotland unless these were grouped with parts of England, which would not be an acceptable option.

The mode of voting could also be changed to avoid the risk of one's vote being unproductive. Changing from an X-vote to preferential voting (i.e. 1 for the first-choice candidate, 2 for the second and so on) for

candidates would solve this problem and reduce the number of unproductive votes to a much lower level.

### **Drawback 3: tactical confusion**

Tactical voting is a huge drawback to FPTP elections – voters are sometimes forced to choose between supporting the candidate they really want and casting a vote to stop the candidate they most dislike being elected. It happens much less in list PR elections, particularly in the larger regions, but it was still a feature of the 2009 campaign. In London, for instance, a voter wavering between Labour and the Greens could look at the results and trends and be reasonably certain that the Greens would win one seat, but no more, while Labour might conceivably have lost their second seat. Labour was therefore the tactical choice. In smaller regions, clearly votes cast for candidates other than those of the big parties in that region stand a strong chance of being unproductive and voters in the North East who favoured, say, the Greens, might have voted tactically for whichever of the larger parties was closest to their opinions.

More seriously, voters were given conflicting advice in the regions where the BNP stood a chance of winning election. Many voters wished to use their vote to help minimise the chances of electing a BNP member, but it was unclear how best to do this. In North West, the Green Party campaigned for tactical anti-BNP votes, with a website [www.stopnickgriffin.org.uk](http://www.stopnickgriffin.org.uk) promoting this view and some newspaper coverage ('Best way to beat the BNP is to vote Green', *Independent* 4 May 2009). The argument was that the Greens were aspiring to a single seat and if they overtook the BNP they would win it instead, while votes for bigger parties would end up counting less

strongly against the BNP because they would be divided according to the D'Hondt formula when competing against the BNP for the final seat.

The Green argument was plausible, and if they had won 4,962 more votes it would have worked. However, the Greens were not the closest competitor – another 2,948 votes for UKIP would have denied Nick Griffin the last seat in North West. In Yorkshire & The Humber the closest competitor was actually Labour, for whom another 10,270 votes would have won them a second seat at the expense of the BNP (the Greens would have needed another 15,684). The allocation of the last seat in large list PR regions is nearly always a close-run thing. These results should suggest that tactical voting in PR elections is a risky manoeuvre that can go wrong, and the Greens were unwise to make it such a centrepiece of their campaign in the north. The claim that the Greens were the best way of stopping the BNP was highly suspect. But it exposes one of the problems of voting with an X in FPTP and list PR elections – the implication that the voter is indifferent regarding all the parties they have chosen not to support. In elections where

the BNP are a force, this is rarely the case. Preferential voting enables voters to express views towards multiple candidates, and make those votes count against candidates they dislike.

## Northern Ireland's STV election

Northern Ireland uses STV for all elections except those to the Westminster parliament. It is a single three-member seat. The contest in 2009 was somewhat unusual in that there were three fairly strong Unionist candidates, with the incumbent ex-Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MEP Jim McAllister campaigning as a Traditional Unionist Voice candidate against the power-sharing agreement, a new DUP candidate and an Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) MEP Jim Nicholson standing in alliance with the British Conservatives. This disunity among the Unionists, however, did not mean that vote splits would harm their chances of returning their usual two MEPs, although it did mean that Sinn Fein's topped the poll for the first time in an election in Northern Ireland even though

**Table 10 First-preference votes in the Northern Ireland European Parliament election 2009**

	First-preference (FP) votes	FP votes (%)	Change in FP vote share (%) 2004–09	Outcome	Seats
DUP	88,346	18.2	-13.8	Elected stage 3	1
UUP	82,893	17.1	+0.5	Elected stage 3	1
Alliance	26,699	5.5	(-1.1)	Eliminated stage 1	
SDLP	78,489	16.2	+0.3	Defeated stage 3	
Sinn Fein	126,184	26.0	-0.3	Elected stage 1	1
Trad Unionist	66,197	13.7	+13.7	Eliminated stage 2	
Green	15,764	3.3	+2.4	Eliminated stage 1	

*Note:* Alliance vote is compared with 2004 vote for an Independent supported by Alliance and some other small parties. SDLP = Social and Democratic Labour Party.

there was a slight slippage in MEP Bairbre de Brun's share of first-preference votes.

No seats changed hands, except the DUP recovered its seat from its former member Jim McAllister. McAllister's challenge to his old party seems to have taken a chunk of the DUP vote with him, with the other main parties' votes remaining remarkably unchanged since 2004. Sinn Fein won the first seat to be awarded because Bairbre de Brun had received more than the quota of 25 per cent of the vote. The elimination of the Alliance and Green candidates put the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) candidate top of the remaining candidates in the second stage of the count, with a small gap between the SDLP, the UUP and the DUP, but McAllister trailing. McAllister's votes transferred, unsurprisingly, mostly to the two Unionists remaining in the contest (but more of them to the UUP than to the DUP) and both Jim Nicholson and DUP candidate Diane Dodds were elected.

Voters in Northern Ireland were able to choose from seven individual candidates (three Unionist, two Nationalist and two cross-community) and vote for their favourite without fear of splitting the vote.

Both list PR and STV proved easy for the voters to use, despite long ballot papers in some English regions, and there was a very low rate of spoilage (0.9 per cent) in Northern Ireland's STV election.

## What STV would look like in Great Britain

STV would mean abolishing lists and having elections at which individual candidates

campaign for votes and could be held accountable as individuals.

STV is the only proportional system that does not involve either party lists or the creation of multiple pathways to getting elected.

STV involves a variable number of members per constituency; broadly, the more members there are per constituency, the more proportional the system becomes. Size of constituency can be adjusted to better fit community identities. However, in most cases STV constituencies would be about the size of the current European regions – for North East (three seats), Wales (four seats), East Midlands (five seats) and Scotland (six seats). The English six-member regions could divide into two three-member STV seats each. Regions of seven or eight seats (East, London, North West) might be split into threes and fours (or fives) – East into East Anglia and northern Home Counties, London broadly along the Thames, North West a bit more problematic. The South East could be split into two fives, one being based on the Thames Valley and one on Kent and Sussex. Or the regions could simply be left as large STV seats.

The STV model would not see any BNP candidates coming close to election, because of the high threshold and the lack of transfers coming into that party. STV would make it more difficult for extreme parties such as the BNP to win seats, because with parties like this people generally either vote for them, or have a strong dislike for them. Under STV this means that extremists do not pick up much extra support from transferred votes. With relatively small electoral districts like this and large numbers of viable parties, there can be some arithmetical effects. Parties with 16 per cent and 30 per cent are likely to get the same allocation of a single seat with three- or four-

**Table 11** Model of constituencies for European elections under STV

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Nat	UKIP	Green	Total
Scotland	1	1	1	2	0	1	6
Wales	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
North East	1	1	1	-	0	0	3
Lancashire and Cumbria	1	1	1	-	1	0	4
Manchester and Cheshire	1	1	1	-	1	0	4
Yorkshire	1	1	0	-	1	0	3
Humber and Don	1	1	0	-	1	0	3
West Midlands North	1	1	0	-	1	0	3
West Midlands South	1	0	1	-	1	0	3
East Midlands	2	1	1	-	1	0	5
East Anglia	1	0	1	-	1	0	3
West Anglia	1	1	1	-	1	0	4
London North East	1	1	0	-	1	1	4
London South West	1	1	1	-	1	0	4
South Central England	2	0	1	-	1	1	5
Garden of England	2	0	1	-	1	1	5
Severn and Wiltshire	1	0	1	-	1	0	3
Peninsula	1	0	1	-	1	0	3
<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>

member STV, while with five-member STV the party with 30 per cent will probably get two seats.

A more proportional version of STV, based on whole regions, would be likely to produce an overall result closer to the actual totals under list PR, although it is probable that the BNP would not have won the seat in the North West because voters would tend to transfer their votes to stop it.

# The local authority elections

The local authority election results were nearly uniformly very bad for Labour, with the loss of all four of the counties the party was defending and large slumps in the party's share of the vote since 2005. The Conservatives were

the main winner, gaining all but one (Cumbria) of the county councils up for election and winning majorities on four of the six all-out unitary elections. The Liberal Democrats were disappointed to lose Devon and Somerset

**Table 12 Results for Conservatives and Labour of local authority elections 2009**

	2005	2009	Con seats	Con % seats	Con % vote	Lab seats	Lab % seats	Lab % vote
Buckinghamshire	Con	Con	46	80.7	<b>50.4</b>	0	0.0	<b>5.5</b>
Cambridgeshire	Con	Con	42	60.9	<b>43.4</b>	2	2.9	<b>9.9</b>
Cumbria	NOC <sup>1</sup>	NOC	38	45.4	<b>40.1</b>	24	28.6	<b>21.4</b>
Derbyshire	Lab	Con	33	53.2	<b>38.9</b>	22	34.4	<b>28.8</b>
Devon	Lib Dem	Con	41	66.1	<b>41.8</b>	4	6.5	<b>6.5</b>
Dorset	Con	Con	28	62.2	<b>48.2</b>	0	0.0	<b>6.3</b>
East Sussex	Con	Con	29	59.2	<b>40.7</b>	4	8.2	<b>8.3</b>
Essex	Con	Con	60	80.0	<b>43.3</b>	1	1.3	<b>10.8</b>
Gloucestershire	Con	Con	42	66.7	<b>43.4</b>	4	6.3	<b>12.1</b>
Hampshire	Con	Con	51	65.4	<b>47.4</b>	1	1.3	<b>6.9</b>
Hertfordshire	Con	Con	55	71.4	<b>46.4</b>	3	3.9	<b>14.8</b>
Kent	Con	Con	74	88.1	<b>46.6</b>	2	2.4	<b>13.3</b>
Lancashire	Lab	Con	51	60.7	<b>41.7</b>	16	19.0	<b>23.9</b>
Leicestershire	Con	Con	36	65.5	<b>44.9</b>	4	7.4	<b>16.1</b>
Lincolnshire	Con	Con	60	77.9	<b>46.5</b>	4	5.2	<b>11.1</b>
Norfolk	Con	Con	60	71.4	<b>46.1</b>	3	3.6	<b>13.8</b>
North Yorkshire	Con	Con	48	66.7	<b>51.8</b>	1	1.4	<b>10.5</b>
Northamptonshire	Con	Con	56	76.7	<b>50.4</b>	8	11.0	<b>18.8</b>
Nottinghamshire	Lab	Con	35	52.2	<b>39.5</b>	13	19.4	<b>23.8</b>
Oxfordshire	Con	Con	52	70.3	<b>44.9</b>	9	12.2	<b>13.2</b>
Somerset	Lib Dem	Con	35	60.3	<b>46.2</b>	2	3.4	<b>4.7</b>
Staffordshire	Lab	Con	49	79.0	<b>43.0</b>	3	4.9	<b>17.8</b>
Suffolk	Con	Con	55	76.4	<b>44.1</b>	4	5.6	<b>13.6</b>
Surrey	Con	Con	56	70.0	<b>46.5</b>	1	1.3	<b>6.0</b>
Warwickshire	NOC	Con	39	62.9	<b>44.4</b>	10	16.1	<b>17.6</b>
West Sussex	Con	Con	48	67.6	<b>48.5</b>	2	2.8	<b>8.5</b>
Worcestershire	Con	Con	42	73.7	<b>42.9</b>	3	5.3	<b>12.2</b>
Bedford UA <sup>2</sup>	(C/N) <sup>3</sup>	NOC	9	25.0	<b>35.8</b>	6	16.7	<b>15.2</b>
Central Beds UA	(Con)	Con	54	81.8	<b>48.7</b>	0	0.0	<b>10.3</b>
Cornwall UA	(Lib Dem)	NOC	44	36.7	<b>33.8</b>	0	0.0	<b>3.4</b>
Isle of Wight UA	Con	Con	27	69.2	<b>45.8</b>	1	2.6	<b>4.7</b>
Shropshire UA	(Con)	Con	54	73.0	<b>47.7</b>	7	9.5	<b>10.9</b>
Wiltshire UA	(Con)	Con	61	62.2	<b>44.9</b>	2	2.0	<b>4.7</b>

Note: (1) NOC = No overall control. (2) UA = Unitary authority. (3) Results in brackets are notional as these UAs did not exist in 2005.

county councils and to be beaten by the Conservatives as the largest party in Cornwall, but had some consolation in finally gaining Bristol in the partial elections for that unitary council, after falling short in several successive sets of elections.

The story in most of the local authorities was pretty similar, with the Conservatives winning a vote share somewhere around 44 per cent and outright control of the council. First Past The Post normally has a 'winner's bonus' in which the largest party obtains a higher share of seats than votes, but the size of this bonus varied between different authorities. In some, particularly Essex, Worcestershire and Kent, it was grossly excessive and meant that opposition voters had hardly any say on the council and the ruling executives will be lacking in accountability. In others, such as Dorset, it was more moderate because the geographical distribution of party support allowed significant numbers of opposition councillors to be elected. However, in 2009 there were many more cases of 'excessive majorities' than in most previous sets of local elections. This is perhaps particularly important given that the counties are large, high-spending local authorities and only come up for election once every four years.

There were fewer cases than usual of two severe problems noted in FPTP elections in this set of local elections. Unlike 2006, 2007 or 2008, there were no cases of 'wrong winners', where a party that had fewer votes than another ended up with overall control. In 2005 Labour had controlled Staffordshire despite polling fewer votes than the Conservatives, but the 2009 election saw their numbers savagely depleted on a further swing. Another problem, of control of councils on a low share of the vote, was also not very notable in 2009. The Conservative share in the counties they

control is higher in each case than Labour's winning share in the general election of 2005, with the lowest (38.9 per cent) being found in Derbyshire.

The main problem with the 2009 election results was, as noted, the excessive majorities in seats, and the flipside of this – namely the extremely low levels of representation that parties with appreciable levels of support sometimes ended up with, and the resultant lack of real debate in the council chambers. Some of the Conservative-controlled counties which now enjoy excessive majorities have generally good reputations for providing services and innovating (Kent and Essex for example) but the lack of political scrutiny and challenge to the governing executives poses the risk that councils will become arrogant, unaccountable and ignorant of the interests of the majority of voters who supported other parties. In the longer term, some of these counties are virtual one-party states, such as Buckinghamshire (Conservative since its creation in 1888) and, particularly on the new boundaries excluding larger towns, places such as Hampshire and North Yorkshire (and Lincolnshire, West Sussex and Surrey, which only just slipped from the Tories in 1993) face no realistic prospect of the Conservatives being displaced from control. FPTP has created these complacent county Tory oligarchies, just as it has created complacent Labour fiefdoms elsewhere.

Even in the authorities that may switch away from the Conservatives in future, the unrepresentative results of FPTP in 2009 have set up problems for the future. It is quite possible that Labour can regain Staffordshire at the next set of elections, but if the party does manage this it will have to cope with moving from having just three councillors to running a large public body in one go in 2013, a fairly extreme ver-

sion of on-the-job training. Labour's re-staffing problems in other counties it ran before 2005, like Northamptonshire and Suffolk, are also potentially acute.

County by county, the extent of Labour's defeat in the 2009 elections becomes clear. The detail is equally grim for the party. There were only 27 districts where Labour polled

**Table 13 Share of votes in the local authority elections 2009**

	Con % vote	Lab % vote	Lib Dem % vote	Green % vote	UKIP % vote	BNP % vote	Local party %	Ind and Other %
Buckinghamshire	50.4	5.5	26.1	1.4	13.7	0.5		2.4
Cambridgeshire	43.4	9.9	33.8	5.9	3.9	-		3.1
Cumbria	40.1	21.4	24.6	2.2	0.8	5.2		5.7
Derbyshire	38.9	28.8	21.2	1.2	0.6	5.2		4.1
Devon	41.8	6.5	29.5	6.8	9.0	0.8		5.6
Dorset	48.2	6.3	35.6	1.1	7.1	0.1		1.6
East Sussex	40.7	8.3	30.6	5.4	7.5	1.3		6.2
Essex	43.3	10.8	20.2	6.8	4.6	8.9	1.5 TF	3.9
Gloucestershire	43.4	12.1	28.5	9.2	2.0	0.1		4.7
Hampshire	47.4	6.9	33.1	1.8	5.9	0.4		4.5
Hertfordshire	46.4	14.8	27.3	7.2	0.9	3.3		0.1
Kent	46.6	13.3	20.8	5.2	6.2	1.0	4.2 ED	2.7
Lancashire	41.7	23.9	14.2	4.2	6.7	3.5	0.6 IT	5.2
Leicestershire	44.9	16.1	24.8	-	-	13.0		1.2
Lincolnshire	46.5	11.1	18.9	0.6	2.9	3.5	9.7 LI	6.6
Norfolk	46.1	13.8	22.8	11.2	4.3	0.8		1.0
North Yorkshire	51.8	10.5	21.4	1.5	0.5	1.8		12.5
Northamptonshire	50.4	18.8	20.6	2.3	-	2.0		5.9
Nottinghamshire	39.5	23.8	18.3	2.6	3.9	3.4	3.3 MI	5.2
Oxfordshire	44.9	13.2	23.2	13.3	2.9	-		2.5
Somerset	46.2	4.7	36.6	2.8	4.2	0.9		4.6
Staffordshire	43.0	17.8	16.7	4.7	9.2	2.3		6.3
Suffolk	44.1	13.6	24.6	8.3	4.1	0.6		4.7
Surrey	46.5	6.0	27.0	1.6	10.1	0.5	6.0 RA	2.3
Warwickshire	44.4	17.6	20.8	10.8	-	3.8		2.6
West Sussex	48.5	8.5	29.0	2.2	8.6	1.8		1.4
Worcestershire	42.9	12.2	18.8	9.3	4.8	3.3	5.4 KH	3.3
Bedford UA	35.8	15.2	28.4	2.2	2.4	0.6		15.4
Central Beds UA	48.7	10.3	29.5	2.3	-	2.4		6.8
Cornwall UA	33.8	3.4	28.3	1.9	3.8	0.2	4.3 MK	24.3
Isle of Wight UA	45.8	4.7	23.4	-	-	0.2		25.9
Shropshire UA	47.7	10.9	22.4	2.3	0.6	1.6		14.5
Wiltshire UA	44.9	4.7	31.6	0.9	6.9	0.8		10.2

Note: TF – Tendring First; ED – English Democrats; IT – Idle Toad; LI – Lincolnshire Independents/Boston Bypass; MI – Mansfield Independents; RA – Residents' Associations; KH – Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern; MK – Mebyon Kernow.



as much as a quarter of the vote in the local elections, and these are listed below. Most of these are the pale shadows of what were once safe Labour areas like Bassetlaw, Corby or Crawley, but there are one or two less than disgraceful showings in marginal areas such as Chorley, Oxford and Hastings.

**Table 14 Districts where Labour polled 25% of the vote or more**

District	County	% in district
Hyndburn (Accrington)	Lancashire	43.7
Bolsover	Derbyshire	41.8
Bassetlaw (Worksop)	Nottinghamshire	38.3
Copeland (Whitehaven)	Cumbria	36.8
Corby	Northamptonshire	36.8
Chesterfield	Derbyshire	36.5
North East Derbyshire	Derbyshire	36.3
Chorley	Lancashire	34.2
Allerdale (Workington)	Cumbria	31.9
Hastings	East Sussex	31.6
Lincoln City	Lincolnshire	31.1
Mansfield	Nottinghamshire	30.3
Stevenage	Hertfordshire	29.8
South Derbyshire	Derbyshire	29.7
Crawley	West Sussex	29.3
West Lancashire	Lancashire	29.2
Carlisle	Cumbria	29.1
Gedling (Nottingham suburb)	Nottinghamshire	29.0
Oxford City	Oxfordshire	28.5
Preston	Lancashire	28.0
Erewash (Long Eaton)	Derbyshire	27.5
Barrow-in-Furness	Cumbria	27.4
Ipswich	Suffolk	27.2
Amber Valley (Heanor)	Derbyshire	27.5
Wellingborough	Northamptonshire	26.9
Rosendale	Lancashire	25.8
Great Yarmouth	Norfolk	25.3

*Note:* This and the following tables sometimes indicate a principal settlement in district council areas that may not be familiar to non-locals; the voting figures apply to the whole district and not just the named town.

The Conservatives had strength in depth in many counties, with 54 districts having a Conservative vote of 50 per cent or more. Even so, their highest shares of the vote were between 60 and 65 per cent – in no area did the party have more than two-thirds of voters on its side, so there is an appreciable minority of non-Conservative voters even in their greatest strongholds, despite the electoral system usually shutting them out. For the most part these areas have long been centres of Conservative support, although some are relatively recent gains from the Liberal Democrats (Waverley) or Labour (Welwyn Hatfield).

**Table 15 Districts where the Conservatives polled 50% or more**

District	County	% in district
Daventry	Northamptonshire	64.0
Hambleton (Northallerton)	North Yorkshire	63.9
East Northamptonshire	Northamptonshire	63.9
South Northamptonshire	Northamptonshire	63.5
South Buckinghamshire	Buckinghamshire	57.7
Waverley	Surrey	60.7
Ribble Valley	Lancashire	60.2
Cotswold	Gloucestershire	59.0
Hertsmere (Potters Bar)	Hertfordshire	58.8
Breckland (Thetford)	Norfolk	57.6
Ryedale (Pickering)	North Yorkshire	56.9
East Hertfordshire	Hertfordshire	56.7
West Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	56.2
Selby	North Yorkshire	55.9
Harborough	Leicestershire	55.6
Tunbridge Wells	Kent	55.3
East Hampshire	Hampshire	55.0
Wychavon (Droitwich)	Worcestershire	54.9
Cherwell (Banbury)	Oxfordshire	54.8



Ashford	Kent	54.7
South Holland (Spalding)	Lincolnshire	54.5
Derbyshire Dales	Derbyshire	54.3
King's Lynn & West Norfolk	Norfolk	54.2
Broxbourne (Cheshunt)	Hertfordshire	53.8
Chichester	West Sussex	53.8
East Dorset	Dorset	53.5
Lichfield	Staffordshire	53.4
Harrogate	North Yorkshire	52.8
Sevenoaks	Kent	52.8
Melton	Leicestershire	52.7
West Somerset	Somerset	52.7
Uttlesford (Saffron Walden)	Essex	52.6
Bassetlaw (Worksop)	Nottinghamshire	52.5
New Forest	Hampshire	52.4
Surrey Heath (Camberley)	Surrey	52.4
Tandridge (Oxted)	Surrey	52.3
Sedgemoor (Bridgwater)	Somerset	52.2
Newark & Sherwood	Nottinghamshire	52.1
South Norfolk	Norfolk	52.1
Welwyn Hatfield	Hertfordshire	52.0
Chiltern (Amersham)	Buckinghamshire	51.9
Basingstoke & Deane	Hampshire	51.7
Runnymede (Egham)	Surrey	51.7
Fenland (Wisbech)	Cambridgeshire	51.5
Wycombe	Buckinghamshire	51.5
Suffolk Coastal	Suffolk	51.4
Huntingdonshire	Cambridgeshire	51.0
South Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	50.9
Kettering	Northamptonshire	50.5
Wyre (Fleetwood)	Lancashire	50.5
East Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire	50.4
Test Valley (Romsey)	Hampshire	50.4
Arun	West Sussex	50.3
West Lindsey (Gainsborough)	Lincolnshire	50.1

The Liberal Democrats had more areas of strength than Labour, but fewer and weaker than the Conservatives' strongholds. Most of them correspond to areas of Lib Dem parliamentary strength or target seats.

**Table 16** Districts where the Liberal Democrats polled 35% of the vote or more

District	County	% in district
South Lakeland	Cumbria	59.3
Oadby & Wigston	Leicestershire	52.4
Eastleigh	Hampshire	46.7
South Somerset	Somerset	45.8
Winchester	Hampshire	44.4
North Norfolk	Norfolk	44.2
Chesterfield	Derbyshire	43.4
Purbeck	Dorset	42.4
Three Rivers (Rickmansworth)	Hertfordshire	42.1
West Lindsey (Gainsborough)	Lincolnshire	41.8
North Dorset	Dorset	41.5
Malvern Hills	Worcestershire	40.9
Watford	Hertfordshire	40.7
East Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire	40.6
West Dorset	Dorset	40.0
South Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire	39.0
St Albans	Hertfordshire	38.8
Woking	Surrey	38.8
East Hampshire	Hampshire	38.3
Mendip (Wells)	Somerset	38.1
Burnley	Lancashire	37.8
Cheltenham	Gloucestershire	37.6
Stratford	Warwickshire	37.4
Cambridge City	Cambridgeshire	36.7
Guildford	Surrey	36.7
Test Valley (Romsey)	Hampshire	36.1
Mid Sussex	West Sussex	36.0
Rother (Bexhill)	East Sussex	35.7
Eastbourne	East Sussex	35.7
Horsham	West Sussex	35.5
Lewes	East Sussex	35.3
Worthing	West Sussex	35.0

Notable performances by local and minor parties are recorded. Tendring First, a local party in north-east Essex, won 1.5 per cent in Essex. The English Democrats won 4.2 per cent in Kent. The Lincolnshire Independents, in alliance with the Boston Bypass Independents, won 9.7 per cent in Lincolnshire. Mansfield Independents won 3.3 per cent in Nottinghamshire (some Ashfield Independents could arguably be included in this share too). The Residents' Associations of Epsom & Ewell, northern Elmbridge and Banstead scored a combined 6.0 per cent in Surrey. Kidderminster Hospital campaigners won 5.4 per cent in Worcestershire, and Mebyon Kernow 4.3 per cent in Cornwall. Mention could also be made of the Idle Toad

political movement in Lancashire, whose sole candidate was elected in South Ribble and accounted for 0.6 per cent of all votes cast in the county. A finer breakdown, by district, is given below.

The strong performance by the big three minor parties (Green, UKIP, BNP) was masked by the strong vote they received in the European elections, but it is significant in showing that, when they put up candidates, they are able to attract votes in local elections as well. The revolt against the main parties is not just an artefact of the apparently cost-free gesture vote that electors feel they can make in European elections. In most counties, at least one of the three main minor parties –

**Table 17 'Others' votes and seats in the local authority elections 2009**

Others	District	County	% vote	Seats
Epsom & Ewell Residents	Epsom & Ewell	Surrey	42.8	4
Kidderminster Hospital Health Concern	Wyre Forest	Worcestershire	33.9	2
Mansfield Independents	Mansfield	Nottinghamshire	30.9	6
Elmbridge Residents	Elmbridge (Walton)	Surrey	22.5	4
English Democrats	Dartford	Kent	21.5	0
Lincolnshire Independents	North Kesteven (Sleaford)	Lincolnshire	15.5	1
Tendring First	Tendring (Clacton)	Essex	14.1	0
English Democrats	Sevenoaks	Kent	13.7	0
Lincolnshire Independents	East Lindsey (Louth)	Lincolnshire	13.0	2
Lincolnshire Independents	South Kesteven (Grantham)	Lincolnshire	12.9	1
Boston Bypass Independents	Boston	Lincolnshire	12.4	1
English Democrats	Gravesham	Kent	12.2	0
Banstead Residents	Reigate & Banstead	Surrey	7.0	1
Idle Toad	South Ribble (Leyland)	Lancashire	6.5	1
Ashfield Independents	Ashfield	Nottinghamshire	6.4	1
Morecambe Bay Independents	Lancaster	Lancashire	5.6	0
Wythall Residents	Bromsgrove	Worcestershire	4.4	1
Mebyon Kernow	Cornwall	Cornwall	4.3	3

Green, UKIP or BNP – is a significant force. The Greens polled particularly strongly in Norfolk, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire, UKIP in Buckinghamshire, Surrey and Staffordshire, and the BNP in Leicestershire and Essex.

**Table 18 Green results for the local authority elections 2009**

District	County	% in district
Norwich	Norfolk	32.7
Oxford City	Oxfordshire	22.2
Lancaster	Lancashire	19.4
Stroud	Gloucestershire	19.2
Waveney (Lowestoft)	Suffolk	17.5
Worcester	Worcestershire	17.1
Cambridge City	Cambridgeshire	15.6
South Hams (Totnes)	Devon	14.5
Mid Suffolk	Suffolk	13.5
Redditch	Worcestershire	13.4
North Hertfordshire	Hertfordshire	12.9
Canterbury	Kent	12.5
Watford	Hertfordshire	12.4
Nuneaton & Bedworth	Warwickshire	12.3
North Warwickshire	Warwickshire	12.2
West Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	12.2
King's Lynn & West Norfolk	Norfolk	11.5
Gravesham	Kent	11.4
Rugby	Warwickshire	11.3
Braintree	Essex	11.2
St Albans	Hertfordshire	11.2
Vale of White Horse (Abingdon)	Oxfordshire	11.2
Welwyn Hatfield	Hertfordshire	11.2
South Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire	11.0
Warwick	Warwickshire	11.0
Uttlesford (Saffron Walden)	Essex	10.5
Colchester	Essex	10.3
Maldon	Essex	10.2
Ashford	Kent	10.1
Cheltenham	Gloucestershire	10.0
Breckland (Thetford)	Norfolk	10.0

**Table 19 UKIP results for the local authority elections 2009**

District	County	% in district
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire	25.8
Forest Heath (Newmarket)	Suffolk	25.7
Adur (Shoreham)	West Sussex	22.6
Christchurch	Dorset	22.1
Runnymede (Egham)	Surrey	21.2
Shepway (Folkestone)	Kent	19.6
Great Yarmouth	Norfolk	18.8
Torridge (Bideford)	Devon	18.4
West Devon	Devon	17.4
Worthing	West Sussex	17.3
South Staffordshire	Staffordshire	16.6
West Lancashire	Lancashire	16.1
Aylesbury Vale	Buckinghamshire	16.0
Wyre (Fleetwood)	Lancashire	15.5
South Buckinghamshire	Buckinghamshire	15.3
Reigate & Banstead	Surrey	14.3
Surrey Heath (Camberley)	Surrey	14.3
Tandridge (Oxted)	Surrey	14.3
Eastleigh	Hampshire	14.1
Basildon	Essex	13.8
Thanet	Kent	13.6
East Dorset	Dorset	13.4
Boston	Lincolnshire	13.0
Malvern Hills	Worcestershire	13.0
Taunton Deane	Somerset	12.8
Stevenage	Hertfordshire	12.5
Fareham	Hampshire	12.3
Wycombe	Buckinghamshire	12.2
Eastbourne	East Sussex	11.7
Woking	Surrey	11.6
Mole Valley (Dorking)	Surrey	10.8
Arun (Bognor Regis)	West Sussex	10.6
Waveney (Lowestoft)	Suffolk	10.6
Chiltern (Amersham)	Buckinghamshire	10.1
Havant	Hampshire	10.1

**Table 20 BNP results for the local authority elections 2009**

District	County	% in district
Burnley	Lancashire	19.4
North West Leicestershire	Leicestershire	17.2
Broxbourne	Hertfordshire	17.1
Nuneaton & Bedworth	Warwickshire	16.2
Copeland (Whitehaven)	Cumbria	15.8
Blaby	Leicestershire	14.9
Charnwood (Loughborough)	Leicestershire	14.9
Melton	Leicestershire	14.4
Pendle	Lancashire	13.9
Harlow	Essex	13.8
Basildon	Essex	13.4
Hinckley & Bosworth	Leicestershire	13.4
Ashfield	Nottinghamshire	12.8
Bolsover	Derbyshire	11.6
Rochford	Essex	11.5
Amber Valley (Heanor)	Derbyshire	11.0
Castle Point (Canvey Island)	Essex	11.0
Epping Forest	Essex	10.4

The BNP elected three county councillors – in Coalville in Leicestershire, Padiham & Burnley West in Lancashire and South Oxhey in Hertfordshire. In each case this illustrated another fact about elections under FPTP. The local winner does not represent the majority, merely the largest minority. Candidates who have much more in common with each other than any of them have with the BNP may split a big majority of the vote and let the BNP win with a small share of the vote. This is what happened in each case – the BNP won 27.7 per cent in Coalville, 29.5 per cent in South Oxhey and 30.7 per cent in Padiham. All these are appreciable amounts of support, but to award the BNP a monopoly on local representation on this basis is ridiculous. In

each area 69 to 75 per cent of the voters are in the position of having no choice but to approach a councillor they did not support, and may dislike strongly, with their county casework, and have the voice of their areas represented at County Hall by a member of the BNP. This does not seem democratic. While opponents of fair electoral systems may point to BNP members gaining election through proportional systems, as in the European Parliament election, PR elections never result in somebody *only* having an extremist representative – there is always an alternative available.

In many of these cases, the presence of the far right results from the disconnection between mainstream party politics and the electorate. Increasingly, FPTP electioneering is about identifying potential supporters and telling them what they want to hear, so that it is not surprising that voters feel the mainstream parties are as bad as each other or that they are ignoring all but a chosen few. Some seats are safe and taken for granted by a party (like Burnley was, or Melton, or Bolsover) and in others there has been two-party competition of an increasingly stale and unproductive nature (as in North West Leicestershire or Basildon). But there is something more serious going on when the outlet for these feelings of frustration is so far beyond the democratic mainstream.

## Local government boundaries

However, for all the votes cast for a variety of parties, the dominant feature of the county and unitary elections was Conservative dominance in terms of seats and control of councils. This is an inescapable fact of FPTP elections.

In the counties this is sometimes aggravated by the pattern of boundary-drawing. There is room to look again at the way the Boundary Committee for England, which determines local government ward and electoral district boundaries, operates. Often the most decisive input into the process comes from the local authority itself, and governing parties do not always set aside their partisan interests when drawing the lines. This has become a particular risk since the policy change before the new boundaries were introduced in 2005, which permitted multi-member county electoral divisions. In some towns this appears to have the effect of swamping areas sympathetic to minority parties, preventing them from electing councillors. Even without any partisan implications, some of the county electoral divisions are bizarre because of the need to combine areas to achieve rough electoral equality. The Ryemead, Tyler's Green & Loudwater division in Wycombe, for example, combines a town centre area of High Wycombe with two detached villages in a strange Y-shaped area. Local government boundary drawing often creates tensions between having units represent recognisable communities, an acceptable level of equality of numbers, and fair representation of political and social groups in the area.

## The solution

There is a readily available alternative to the unfair FPTP system for local elections. The Single Transferable Vote is used already in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and has been recommended by the Sunderland Commission (2002) which reviewed local government in Wales. The Councillors Commission under Dame Jane Roberts made favourable reference to STV and recommended that councils be allowed to adopt it.

The following section takes Kent as a case study of what is wrong with FPTP in county council government and how STV corrects its flaws.

## Kent: how FPTP fails, and why STV would work better

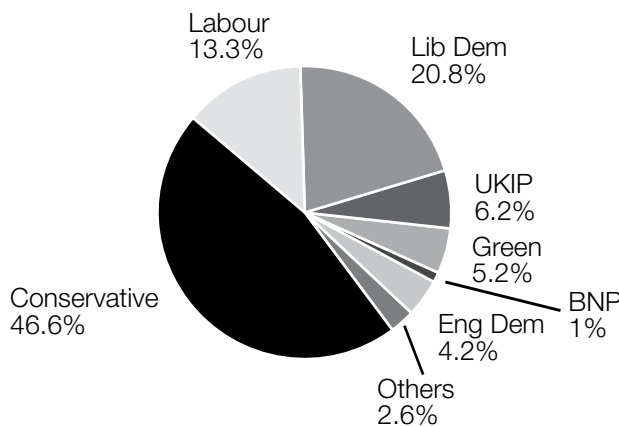
The 2009 election result in Kent was particularly disproportionate. The Conservatives won 46.6 per cent of the vote but a massive 88.1 per cent of the seats on the county council. With 74 Conservative seats out of 84, and the remaining seats split between seven Lib Dems, two Labour and one Residents' Association councillor, it will be difficult for the council to manage effective scrutiny of the executive. The opposition are too few in number, and the large number of backbench Conservative councillors will lack the incentive to ask awkward questions of the council leadership. Nearly all the opposition councillors represent urban areas of the main towns in Kent, and there are four districts (Dover, Sevenoaks, Swale and Tunbridge Wells) which have Conservative monopolies on their county councillors against the wishes of around half their voters (56 per cent in Dover, 55 per cent in Swale, 48 per cent in Sevenoaks and 45 per cent in Tunbridge Wells).

The FPTP election result in Kent was a poor representation of the voters' desire to see a wider range of views and party allegiances represented at County Hall. Twenty per cent of the voters chose other than the three main parties, but only one councillor out of 84 (a Swanscombe & Greenhithe Residents' Association councillor) is not affiliated to the big three. There were significant levels of support for three more parties – UKIP, the Greens and the English Democrats – but no councillors.

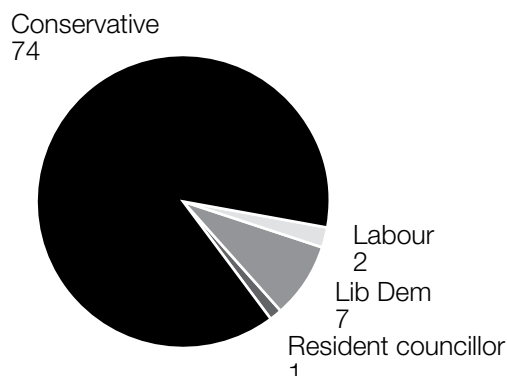
**Table 21 Support for minor parties in Kent's local authority elections 2009**

	Votes	Vote (%)	Seats contested (out of 72)	Average share in seats contested (%)
UKIP	24,324	6.2	25	17.3
Green	20,481	5.2	33	10.6
English Dem	16,644	4.2	24	13.5

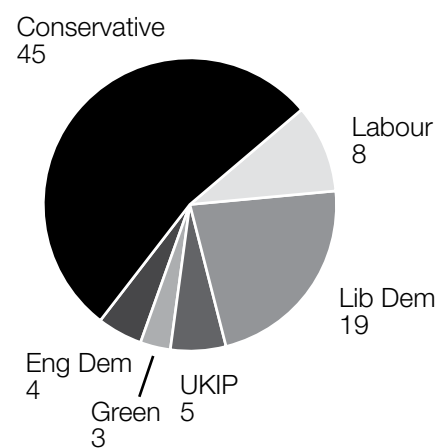
**Figure 5 Vote % shares, Kent County Council, June 2009**



**Figure 6 Seats Kent County Council, June 2009, actual FPTP**



**Figure 7 Seats Kent County Council, June 2009, STV model**



An election result under STV would still give the Conservatives a majority on the county council, but by six votes rather than the grossly excessive 64-vote margin manufactured by FPTP. Their majority is merited because 46.6 per cent is not far short of majority support, no other party has anywhere close to their level of backing from the electors, and because there is no alternative coalition that could plausibly claim the authority to run the county. But the extent of their popular support cannot justify their lopsided dominance of the council chamber. A more modest Conservative lead would mean that the executive would be obliged to explain and account for their actions before the council, and listen more to backbench opinion.

STV would also mean that all councillors faced real electoral competition. Under FPTP in Kent, there are some areas where the Conservative candidate is essentially guaranteed a seat on the county council. Even in strongly Conservative areas under STV, there would be more than one candidate and voters could exercise choice. If they disagreed, for instance,

**Table 22 Comparison of FPTP and model STV system in Kent**

	Conservative			Labour			Lib Dem			Others		
	Vote (%)	FPTP seats	STV seats	Vote (%)	FPTP seats	STV seats	Vote (%)	FPTP seats	STV seats	Vote (%)	FPTP seats	STV seats
Ashford	54.7	6	4	10.7	0	1	23.3	1	2	11.3	0	0
Canterbury	41.7	8	4	9.6	0	0	27.3	1	2	21.4	0	2 Green 1 UKIP
Dartford	42.4	5	3	19.6	0	1	8.4	0	0	29.6	1 R	2 Eng Dem
Dover	46.2	7	3	22.1	0	2	24.1	0	2	7.6	0	0
Gravesham	40.0	4	2	22.9	1	1	10.3	0	0	26.8	0	1 Eng Dem 1 Green
Maidstone	45.6	6	4	6.2	0	0	29.9	3	4	18.4	0	1 UKIP
Sevenoaks	52.8	7	5	7.8	0	0	18.5	0	1	20.8	0	1 Eng Dem
Shepway	45.5	6	3	6.2	0	0	20.4	1	1	27.9	0	2 UKIP
Swale	45.4	7	4	19.9	0	1	16.8	0	2	17.8	0	0
Thanet	40.6	7	4	21.9	1	2	14.6	0	1	23.0	0	1 UKIP
Tonbridge & Malling	49.9	6	5	9.0	0	0	20.5	1	2	20.6	0	0
Tunbridge Wells	55.3	6	4	8.5	0	0	27.6	0	2	11.3	0	0

Note: R = Residents

with a decision that affected their area, they could distinguish between Conservative candidates on the basis of whether they supported the decision or not. Electors would have a choice of party and councillor to go to, and local politicians would have incentives to compete in serving the public in their areas.





# The Mayoral Elections

Three directly elected mayors were chosen on 4 June 2009, in three boroughs which were among the first to adopt this model of local government. In Hartlepool there was no change as the incumbent Independent mayor Stuart Drummond won his third election (although by a closer margin than he had enjoyed in 2005). In North Tyneside the Conservative candidate, Linda Arkley, who had held the office from 2003 to 2005, defeated her Labour successor John Harrison, who had held the mayoralty from 2005 to 2009. In one of the most surprising results of the night, the candidate of the English Democrats, Peter Davies, was elected Mayor of Doncaster. The incumbent, Martin Winter, who did not stand in the election, was elected as Labour in 2002 and 2005 but left the party and had latterly been Independent. The full results are given in Table 23.

Understandably, the priority for council elections departments when counting the may-

oral elections is to find out who has won the election. In most places the second count involves sorting the ballots cast for eliminated candidates into three piles – one each for the candidates going through to the second round, and a third pile for the votes that cannot be transferred. They may or may not distinguish at this stage between people who have left their second choice blank, and those who have cast a second preference for another eliminated candidate. While in London, where the ballots are machine counted, the full matrix of transfers is available (i.e. the number of people voting for each available combination of first and second preferences is known), it is not available for other SV elections. This means that it is impossible to tell whether an alternative process of counting results could have produced a different outcome (for instance, whether Maye rather than Davies might have won under AV [Alternative Vote]). It is also impossible to tell where inward transfers originate, which might be interesting to look at.

**Table 23 Results for the Doncaster mayoral election 2009**

		First vote	%	Second vote	%	Final vote	% vote	% used vote
Peter Davies	English Democrats	16,961	22.5	8,383	20.4	25,344	33.7	50.4
Stuart Exelby	Community Group	2,152	2.9	-	-	-	-	-
Michael Felse	Independent	2,051	2.7	-	-	-	-	-
Sandra Holland	Labour	16,549	22.0	-	-	-	-	-
Michael Maye	Independent	17,150	22.8	7,840	19.1	24,990	33.2	49.6
Dave Owen	BNP	8,195	10.9	-	-	-	-	-
Jonathan Wood	Conservative	12,198	16.2	-	-	-	-	-
Non-transferred	-	-	-	23,501	57.1	24,922	33.1	-
Rejected	-	1,980	2.6	1,421	3.5	-	-	-

Note: The 'non-transferred' figure in the 'Final vote' column includes all valid first-preference votes that did not count towards the final result, i.e. voters whose second-round vote was void for uncertainty, cast for the same candidate as in the first round, or for another candidate who did not make it to the final round.

**Table 24 Results for the Hartlepool mayoral election 2009**

		First vote	%	Second vote	%	Final vote	%	% used vote
Martyn Aiken	UKIP	1,844	8.6	-	-	-	-	-
Christine Blakey	Independent	204	0.9	-	-	-	-	-
Ian Cameron	Independent	4,280	19.9	1,743	14.6	6,023	28.0	46.7
*Stuart Drummond	Independent	5,268	24.5	1,599	13.4	6,867	32.0	53.3
Cheryl Dunn	BNP	1,352	6.3	-	-	-	-	-
Lynne Gillam	Lib Dem	464	2.2	-	-	-	-	-
Jim Gillespie	Independent	986	4.6	-	-	-	-	-
Barbara Jackson	Independent	461	2.1	-	-	-	-	-
Tony Morrell	Independent	1,457	6.8	-	-	-	-	-
Iris Ryder	Independent	594	2.8	-	-	-	-	-
Chris Simmons	Labour	2,921	13.6	-	-	-	-	-
Alison Willetts	Independent	564	2.6	-	-	-	-	-
David Young	Conservative	1,092	5.1	-	-	-	-	-
Non-transferred	-	-	-	6,867	57.5	8,597	40.0	-
Rejected	-	388	1.8	1,730	14.5	-	-	-

Note: \* = Incumbent contesting the election.

**Table 25 Results for the North Tyneside mayoral election 2009**

		First vote	%	Second vote	%	Final vote	%	% used vote
Linda Arkley	Conservative	24,784	42.4	2,299	16.6	27,083	46.4	54.5
Robert Batten	Nat Front	1,086	1.9	-	-	-	-	-
John Burrows	BNP	3,398	5.8	-	-	-	-	-
Martin Collins	Green	1,995	3.4	-	-	-	-	-
*John Harrison	Labour	19,823	33.9	2,881	20.3	22,634	38.7	45.5
Nigel Huscroft	Lib Dem	7,343	12.6	-	-	-	-	-
Non-transferred	-	-	-	8,712	63.0	8,712	14.9	-
Rejected	-	746	1.3	-	-	-	-	-

Note: \* = Incumbent contesting the election.

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## Supplementary Vote: a flawed electoral system

In none of the mayoral elections did the eventual winner have the support of half the voters – and although the support for Davies and Drummond in the elections was particularly low, with only around a third of the vote each, there have been mayors elected with even less support in the past in Torbay and Stoke-on-Trent. The original intention of the SV system was to provide majority support, and it has failed. SV is based on an assumption that has been falsified time and time again in mayoral contests – that there are essentially two viable contenders and a number of other candidates who are just showing the flag. In Doncaster the gap between the first- and third-placed candidates' first votes was only 601, less than 1 per cent of the votes cast. SV requires voters wishing to cast an effective second vote to guess which candidates will be the top two.

Yet again, SV has proved itself to be a flawed electoral procedure. The alternative, most emphatically, is not First Past The Post. FPTP involves even more tactical complications and people not voting for the candidate they really support, and would risk awarding the strong powers that go with the mayoralty on the basis of 22.8 per cent (Doncaster) or 24.5 per cent (Hartlepool) of the vote.

The change that would ensure more representative results, and fewer wasted votes and guessing games, would be to adopt the Alternative Vote. Voters would not be constrained to only two choices, but could number as many candidates as they like in order of preference.



# National implications

The 2009 local and European elections were unambiguously bad for the Labour Party. Labour's 15.7 per cent vote in the European Parliament election was a record low for the party, and an extremely low share of the vote for a party of government by any standards. Labour's fifth place in the South East and South West regions in the European Parliament elections is a dreadful humiliation. In the local authority elections, the loss of the four Labour counties might have been expected, given that the party had won two of them by narrow margins in 2005, when the party was helped by being relatively popular, and by the general election level of turnout. But for all of them to go to Conservative majority control – and the near erasure of Labour from many council chambers – was a very bad result.

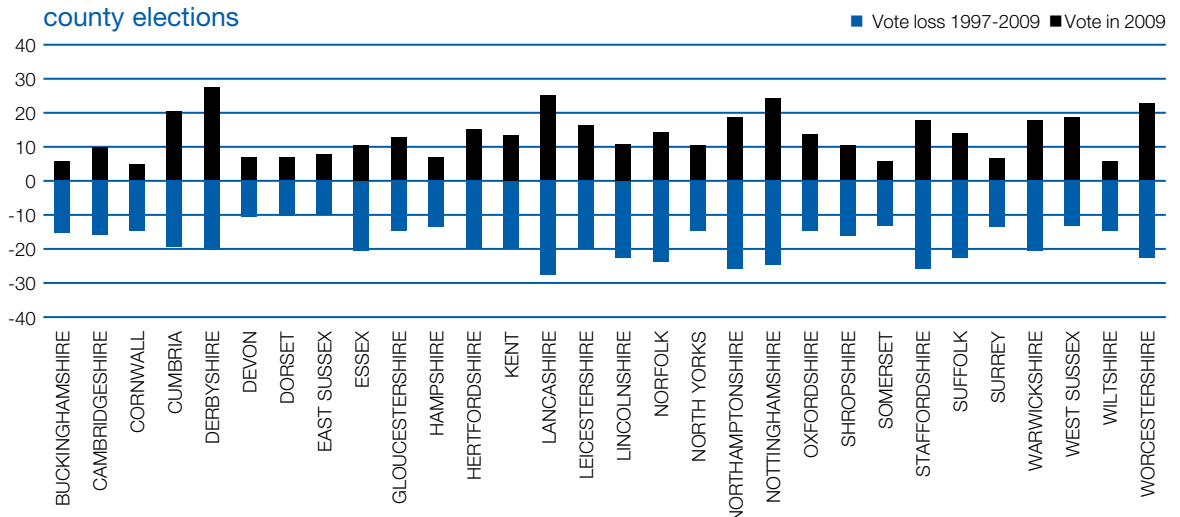
Labour's vote has collapsed to very low levels in many counties – below 10 per cent in eleven of the authorities contested on 4 June. There was only one county, Derbyshire, where more than a quarter of those voting supported Labour. While rural England has always been

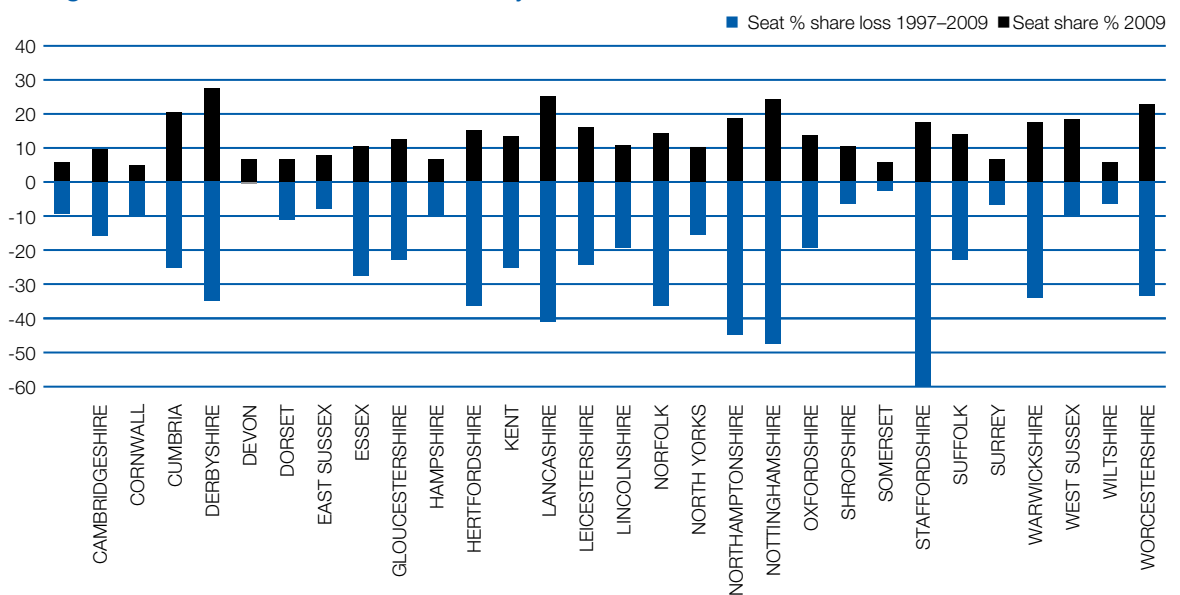
an area of Labour weakness, these county elections, on top of three years of bad results in other local elections, have erased Labour from elected office in many areas.

The toll in seats is often even worse than the loss of votes. Only six of these authorities have more than 10 per cent Labour among their membership – three counties Labour lost in 2009 (Derbyshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire), plus Cumbria, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, which have some hard-core Labour areas, and Oxfordshire because Labour performed relatively well in the city of Oxford. The ebb tide for Labour in the south and Midlands has reduced its county council membership to a few pools of support, sometimes (as in Exeter, Hastings and Oxford) holding on bravely against the prevailing trend where apparently less marginal seats elsewhere have been lost.

Looking at the detailed map of the local government elections in 2009, Labour's showing is dire. Of the 61 constituencies which Labour

**Figure 8 Labour % vote in county/UA elections 2009 and % vote loss since 1997 county elections**



**Figure 9 Labour % seats in 2009 county elections and % seat loss since 1997**

held in 2005 in the county election areas, the party led in only four in 2009: Dennis Skinner's ever-loyal fortress of Bolsover, Preston and Hyndburn in Lancashire, and the surprising success in the marginal Oxford East constituency following good local election results in the generally poor Labour year of 2006. Given Oxford's tag, courtesy of Matthew Arnold, as the 'home of lost causes', this may not be entirely encouraging for Labour.

However, the splintering of the vote means that the Conservatives have not had it all their own way. Their share of the vote in some seats, such as Hastings, Broxtowe and Loughborough, does not inspire confidence that they have the seats wrapped up, and even in their Essex and Kent target seats like Harlow and Dartford they lost votes to the right in large quantities in 2009 (to the BNP in Harlow, and the English Democrats in Dartford). Some constituencies, particularly in the Midlands, saw huge swings to the

Conservatives, such as Tamworth and Rugby, bearing out opinion poll findings that the Conservatives are doing well in the Midlands. There did not seem to be any particular pattern of the parties of local MPs involved in stories about expenses being punished.

Not surprisingly, there was no good news for Labour in the seats the party lost in 2005, with particularly enormous swings in marginal Hemel Hempstead and Wellingborough.

Labour, therefore, had a uniformly bad time of it, but despite the Conservatives' gains of Devon and Somerset counties from the Liberal Democrats, and their strong result in Cornwall, there was not a very strong pattern of the Conservatives overhauling the Lib Dems in the seats that are closely fought between those two parties. Two supposedly marginal new seats, Meon Valley and Devon Central, however, did seem to swing to the Conservatives. Sitting Lib Dem MPs away from

**Table 26** County council elections in Labour-held constituencies

**Labour** need to retain majority

	Lab lead 05	Swing		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP	
Crawley	2	0.2	10	CON	49	29	13	-	-	5
Harlow	4	0.6	9	CON	39	22	17	9	-	14
Oxford East	6	0.7	-6	LAB	18	33	21	21	4	-
Stroud	16	1.9	12	CON	42	19	18	19	1	1
Dartford	17	1.9	13	CON	43	19	9	-	-	3
Watford	21	2.3	14	Lib Dem	28	18	43	10	-	1
Hastings & Rye	24	2.5	8	CON	41	27	21	-	1	7

**Labour** need to remain largest single party

	Lab lead 05	Swing		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP	
Corby	28	3.1	12	CON	48	28	18	2	-	4
Dorset South	33	3.7	16	CON	42	13	35	2	2	-
Northampton South	34	3.8	12	CON	42	22	19	4	-	1
High Peak	35	3.8	11	CON	42	24	25	2	4	2
Loughborough	36	3.9	6	CON	38	29	18	-	-	13
Stafford	39	4.0	12	CON	43	23	12	10	3	6
Broxtowe	40	4.4	11	CON	36	18	25	6	5	4
Burton	41	4.8	12	CON	41	22	15	1	9	7
Redditch	45	5.2	14	CON	41	19	17	13	6	5
Rugby	46	5.2	16	CON	46	20	21	12	-	3
Pendle	47	5.3	11	CON	37	21	25	-	3	14
South Ribble	50	5.4	18	CON	55	25	13	1	6	-
Derbyshire South	51	5.5	14	CON	48	26	11	-	-	8
Bristol North West	52	5.7	12	CON	36	17	31	8	-	2
Tamworth	54	5.9	17	CON	48	20	13	7	-	-
Worcester	58	6.8	13	CON	43	23	11	17	-	5
Great Yarmouth	61	7.4	13	CON	44	25	8	3	19	1
Norwich South	62	7.4	23	GRN	21	18	25	34	2	-
Bedford	65	8.0	16	Lib Dem	32	21	34	4	2	-
Stevenage	66	8.1	8	CON	34	26	16	6	10	5

**Conservatives** need to obtain overall majority

	Lab lead 05	Swing		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP	
Lancaster & Fleetwood	76	8.8	11	CON	36	23	8	23	7	3
Northampton North	80	9.0	14	Lib Dem	32	19	35	4	-	3
Lincoln	83	9.5	12	CON	42	28	25	-	-	4
Leicestershire North West	84	9.5	15	CON	42	21	18	-	-	17
Gedling	85	9.5	9	CON	37	29	20	2	7	5
Nuneaton	87	9.7	13	CON	43	27	2	14	-	15
Warwick & Leamington	88	10.4	13	CON	35	20	24	12	-	1
Dover	90	10.4	16	CON	45	23	23	-	5	-
Morecambe & Lunesdale	99	11.7	16	CON	41	21	9	12	8	-
Ipswich	101	11.8	10	CON	37	29	22	9	-	4
Waveney	105	12.0	15	CON	38	20	14	17	11	-
Amber Valley	108	12.5	10	CON	39	32	13	-	-	15
Barrow & Furness	109	12.5	15	CON	40	23	14	2	-	1
Gloucester	111	13.0	17	CON	38	17	30	7	5	-
Copeland	114	13.2	10	CON	40	34	7	3	1	13
Carlisle	116	13.5	11	CON	38	30	15	4	2	9
Hyndburn	120	13.8	5	LAB	39	42	2	1	1	0

**Conservatives** need for comfortable majority

	Lab lead 05	Swing		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP	
Lancashire West	123	14.1	12	CON	42	32	-	10	16	-
Burnley	129	14.8	14	Lib Dem	18	25	38	-	-	19
Warwickshire North	133	15.3	12	CON	39	33	5	11	0	7
Erewash	138	15.7	12	CON	39	31	12	2	-	8
Sherwood	141	15.9	15	CON	42	28	4	-	9	3
Chorley	144	16.4	15	CON	48	34	2	-	15	-
Norwich North	146	16.6	17	CON	38	20	16	17	9	1
Exeter	152	17.3	12	CON	29	22	25	9	10	2
Bassetlaw	158	17.9	15	CON	52	40	5	-	-	-



'Safe' Labour seats in 2005

		Lab lead 05	Swing		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP
Newcastle-u-Lyme	181	20.4	14	CON	28	21	19	1	27	4
Cannock Chase	188	21.0	17	CON	34	22	19	9	8	4
Derbyshire NE	200	22.3	12	CON	35	33	24	2	-	-
Workington	205	23.0	13	CON	37	35	10	4	-	6
Ashfield	218	24.3	21	Lib Dem	17	23	30	2	-	13
Preston	241	27.7	7	LAB	24	38	24	3	2	-
Mansfield	267	31.4	NA	LOC	22	30	9	-	5	-
Bolsover	335	47.7	14	LAB	24	43	14	-	-	9

Table 27 Seats Labour narrowly missed in 2005 (on new boundaries)

		Con/Lib Dem lead 05 (%)	Swing (%)		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP
Shrewsbury & Atcham	3.6	13	CON	49	19	27	2	1	1	
St Albans	2.9	NA	Lib Dem	33	11	44	11	-	1	
Scarborough & Whitby	2.7	12	CON	41	14	15	5	-	1	
Bristol West	2.6	15	Lib Dem	16	17	43	22	-	1	
Thanet South	1.8	10	CON	41	23	17	-	11	3	
Gravesham	1.5	9	CON	40	23	10	11	-	-	
Wellingborough	1.3	18	CON	56	22	13	4	-	3	
Kettering	0.4	15	CON	50	21	16	2	-	1	
Hemel Hempstead	0.4	18	CON	51	16	19	10	-	4	
Sittingbourne & Sheppey	0.1	11	CON	44	23	18	1	1	5	

**Table 28 Conservative/Liberal Democrat seats 2005**

	Con lead 05 (%)	Swing (%)		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP
Guildford	0.2	3 to CON	CON	46	6	41	1	6	0
Eastbourne	1.4	3 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	34	3	38	6	11	-
Ludlow	4.4	7 to CON	CON	42	7	24	3	-	1
Dorset West	4.6	2 to CON	CON	49	6	40	3	-	-
Meon Valley	4.9	8 to CON	CON	53	4	32	4	7	-
Devon Central	5.0	6 to CON	CON	48	3	31	8	8	1
Devon West & Torridge	5.4	4 to CON	CON	41	4	28	2	18	-
Wells	5.7	5 to CON	CON	48	5	33	2	6	1
Worcestershire West	6.0	4 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	39	-	41	8	11	-
Harborough	8.1	7 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	40	8	45	-	-	6
Dorset North	8.6	2 to CON	CON	52	4	40	-	5	-
Chelmsford	9.2	7 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	36	7	41	7	3	6

**Table 29 Liberal Democrat/Conservative seats 2005**

	Lib Dem lead 05 (%)	Swing (%)		Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Green	UKIP	BNP
Cheltenham	0.7	1 to CON	CON	40	5	38	11	3	-
Somerton & Frome	1.1	5 to CON	CON	51	3	42	3	1	-
Eastleigh	1.1	9 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	30	6	49	-	15	-
Westmorland & Lonsdale	1.7	10 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	36	3	59	-	1	0
Taunton Deane	3.3	5 to CON	CON	41	8	34	-	13	-
Chippenham	4.7	0 to Lib Dem	Lib Dem	38	5	44	1	2	1
Cornwall North	6.9	2 to CON	Lib Dem	36	-	38	0	2	0
Truro & Falmouth	9.3	8 to CON	CON	32	5	25	1	0	0

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the south west, in Westmorland & Lonsdale and Eastleigh, received some good news from the local results (although in Eastleigh the Liberal Democrats do seem to have a stronger hold on local voting than for parliamentary elections).

There are of course many hazards in reading across from local elections to constituency projections. In many cases the boundaries do not correspond exactly with county electoral divisions, and allocating votes to constituencies cannot be precise. Not all parties contest all seats, so that – particularly for parties that are locally weak – their share of the vote will be understated. In some areas non-party candidates poll well in local elections, and their vote cannot be translated into a national context. Above all, voters do choose differently at different sorts of elections. There were numerous examples in 2005 and 2001 of different results at county and general elections; there are places where, for instance, large numbers of people vote Lib Dem in local elections but supported Labour in 2005 (e.g. Gloucester), and some where the local Conservatives tend to under- (Stevenage) or over-perform (Great Yarmouth) in terms of their parliamentary vote. But there is no disputing the broad picture that, despite a relatively low level of national support (in the high 30s per cent) the Conservatives would win a large parliamentary majority on the basis of the 2009 local and European elections.

It is possible to discern a future for British politics in which the Conservatives have long-term control of the government, despite the percentage of their vote starting relatively low – in the high 30s – and declining to the low 30s. The remainder would be split between a Labour Party with support in the mid 20s per cent, the Liberal Democrats in the low 20s, and Greens, UKIP, the nationalists and others

sharing out the remaining 20 per cent of the vote. The implications of such a situation for democracy and accountability are potentially serious. We have already had one government which has been elected on only 35 per cent of the vote, and have seen the strain the 2005–10 parliamentary term has placed on the relationship between government and governed. There is a risk that this condition will become permanent.



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# A tale of two elections

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The 2009 local and European elections were an extraordinary political event. The electorate gave a vote of no confidence in the established parties, particularly Labour. In the county elections an unrepresentative electoral system translated this into lopsided Conservative dominance of English local government. Popular feeling, in all its attractive and unattractive variety, was at least fairly represented in the European elections.

However, the European electoral system is too flawed to be a good model for reforming other aspects of democracy. In a situation in which the personal accountability of elected officials was very much under discussion, the closed list system allowed people no say on which individuals represented the party in parliament.

In a multi-party Britain – which is here to stay – we need an electoral system that both fairly represents the votes that were cast, and gives electors power to make candidates accountable for their decisions and actions. The Single Transferable Vote is the obvious solution for local government, and it would also add a valuable element of direct accountability to the European Parliament election.



# Definition of STV European Parliament constituencies

North East	Whole region
Lancashire and Cumbria	Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Halton
Manchester and Cheshire	Gtr Manchester, Cheshire excl. Halton
Yorkshire	North Yorkshire excl. Selby; Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds
Humber and Don	Humberside, South Yorkshire, Selby, Wakefield
West Midlands North	Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Walsall, Wolverhampton
West Midlands South	Coventry, Herefordshire, Solihull, Warwickshire, Worcestershire
East Midlands	Whole region
East Anglia	Norfolk, Suffolk, Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, Maldon, Rochford, Tendring, Uttlesford
West Anglia	Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Epping Forest, Harlow, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock
London North East	Boroughs north of Thames, excl. Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Richmond
London South West	Boroughs south of Thames, plus Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow
South Central England	Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire
Garden of England	Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex
Severn and Wiltshire	Avon (CUBA), Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset excl. South Somerset
Peninsula	Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gibraltar, Scilly Isles, South Somerset





# Abbreviations

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<b>AV</b>	Alternative Vote	<b>RA</b>	Residents' Associations
<b>BME</b>	black and minority ethnic	<b>SDLP</b>	Social and Democratic Labour Party
<b>BNP</b>	British National Party	<b>SMP</b>	Single Member Plurality
<b>Con</b>	Conservatives	<b>SNP</b>	Scottish National Party
<b>DUP</b>	Democratic Unionist Party	<b>STV</b>	Single Transferable Vote
<b>Eng Dem</b>	English Democrats	<b>SV</b>	Supplementary Vote
<b>EU</b>	European Union (EU)	<b>TF</b>	Tending First
<b>FPTP</b>	First Past The Post	<b>UA</b>	Unitary Authority
<b>IT</b>	Idle Toad	<b>UKIP</b>	UK Independence Party
<b>KH</b>	Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern	<b>UUP</b>	Ulster Unionist Party
<b>Lab</b>	Labour		
<b>LI</b>	Lincolnshire Independents/Boston Bypass		
<b>Lib Dem</b>	Liberal Democrats		
<b>List PR</b>	closed regional list Proportional Representation		
<b>MEP</b>	Member of the European Parliament		
<b>MI</b>	Mansfield Independents		
<b>MK</b>	Mebyon Kernow		
<b>MNTV</b>	Multiple Non-Transferable Vote		
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament		
<b>NI</b>	Northern Ireland		
<b>NOC</b>	No overall control		





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# County and European elections



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5 June 2009

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