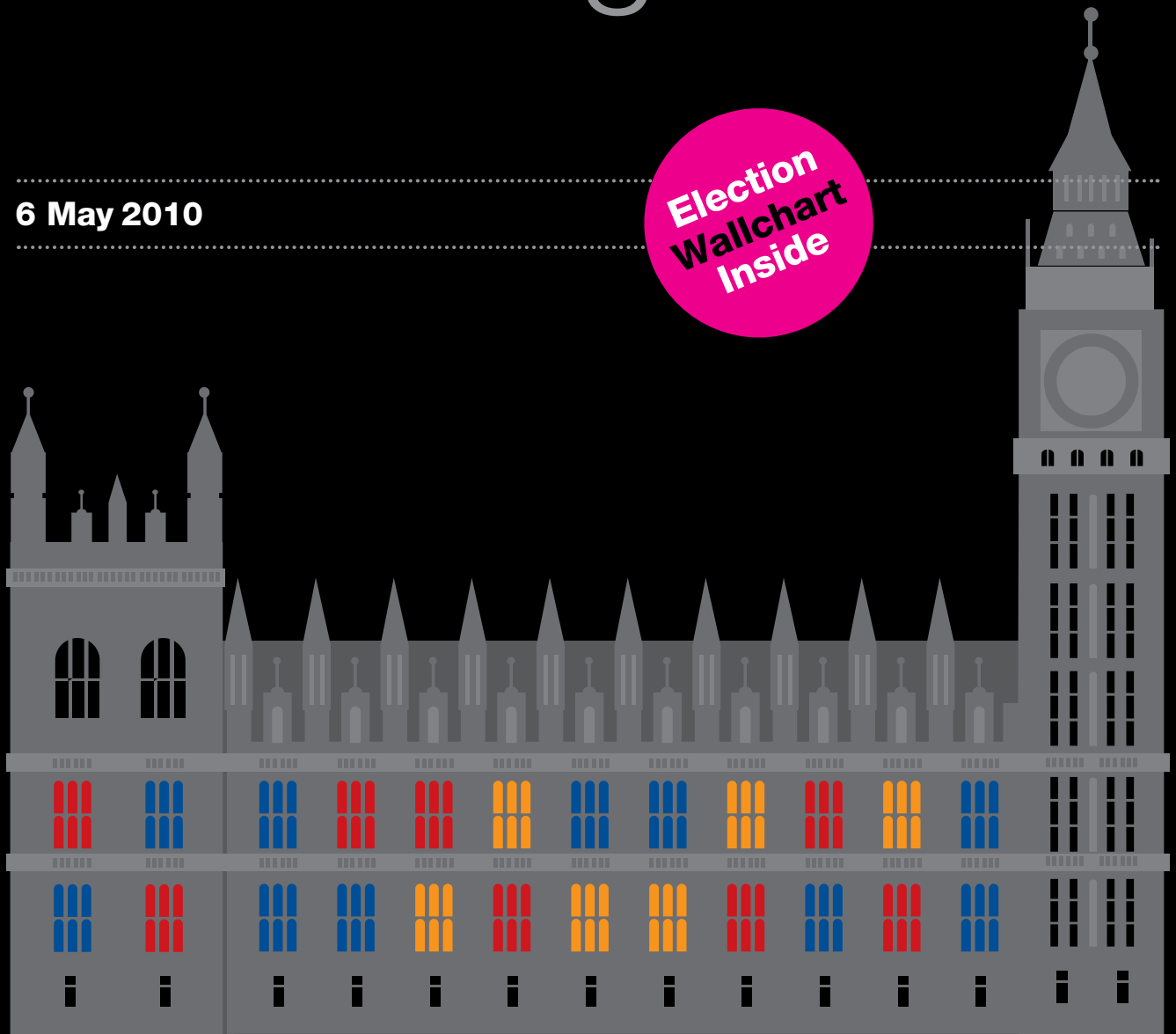


# The UK General Election 2010

## Facts & figures

6 May 2010

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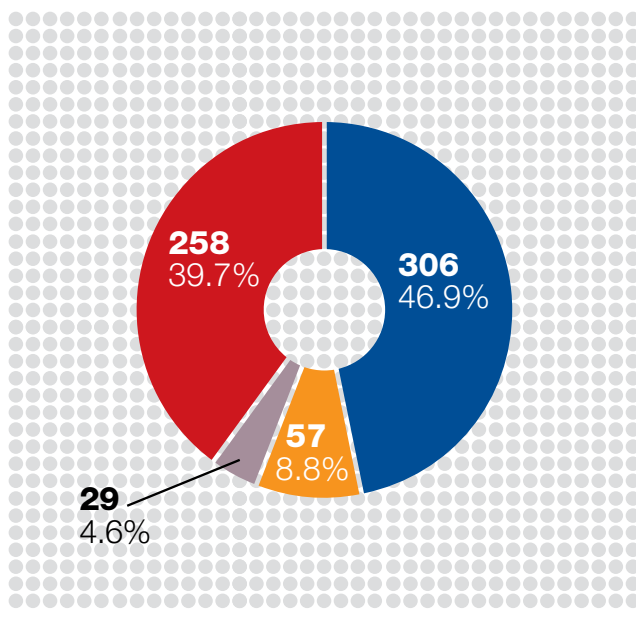
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# The 2010 General Election

**The campaign, the result and the coalition deal that followed ensured 2010 will be remembered as a remarkable election.**

The campaign was the first to feature direct head-to-head televised debates between the leaders of the three largest UK parties. These debates changed the nature of the campaign and inspired considerable public interest in the campaign.

## Seat Share 2010 General Election



The election was also the first since February 1974 to produce no overall majority for any party (although there were hung parliaments in 1976-79 and intermittently in 1994-97 as government majorities were whittled away). House of Commons majorities have become the norm and indeed this pattern is used as an argument in favour of the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system.

However, the lack of an overall majority for any party among the people who voted is nothing new - there has not been a majority mandate for any party since 1935.

## The Chance for Reform

The 2010 election also brought with it the real prospect of a change to the electoral system for the House of Commons.

The outgoing Labour government's manifesto promised a referendum on the Alternative Vote (AV). The two incoming coalition parties had different policies (the Lib Dems for proportional representation, the Conservatives for FPTP) but reached agreement on a referendum on AV as well.

**Depending on the result of the referendum, the 2010 election may be the last conducted for the House of Commons under FPTP.**

# Election results

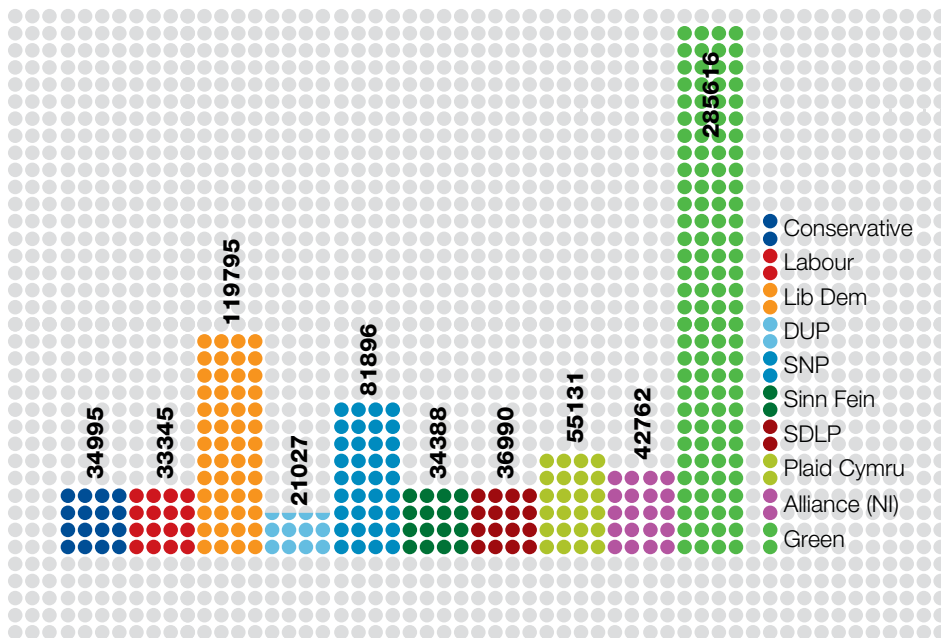
## Digested

■ In contrast to every other election since October 1974 (and most before then) the electoral system failed to translate a plurality of votes cast into a majority of seats in the House of Commons.

■ The 2010 election saw a historic low for the combined share of votes for the two main parties (57%), and although there remains a substantial bloc of 'other' MPs the electoral system maintains the two-party dominance of the House of Commons (89% of MPs).

■ The number of votes cast for a party per MP in the House of Commons varies widely, with votes for the Conservatives, Labour, the DUP and Northern Ireland nationalists being efficiently translated and those for the Liberal Democrats, SNP and the Greens much less so.

### Votes per MP



■ Turnout in 2010 rose to 65.1%. Although this is higher than the turnout of around 60% recorded in the previous two elections, no other election since 1918 has had a turnout below 70%.

■ Turnout in UK elections is lower than in most other established democracies; most EU states with lower turnout in their last election were post-communist countries in eastern and central Europe.

## Coalitions

The general election of 6 May 2010 was a remarkable enough campaign and result, even without the dramatic political developments of the following week in which the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition was agreed – Britain's first coalition formed outside wartime or emergency since 1918, or arguably even 1895.

By comparison with other nations, even those quite experienced in coalition government, the inter-party discussions were orderly and took place relatively rapidly, enabling the agreement of a coalition programme and formation of a government the week after the general election.

There was no financial crisis (even given the unstable conditions in world markets) and few in either coalition party feel that they have traded away their manifesto commitments in the proverbial (and largely mythical) smoke filled room – most of the policies of the government reflect those of the larger party in the coalition, namely the Conservatives. Many of the spectres conjured up about hung parliaments and coalitions have turned out to be entirely illusory; Britain's political leaders proved capable of dealing with the new situation.

# North vs South

## Widening the Divide

**Votes and representation are increasingly polarising on the basis of a Conservative south and east against a Labour north and Scotland; the system of representation exaggerates the dependence of each main party on its heartland regions.**

One of the most surprising features about the relationship between votes and seats in 2010 is that nearly one Labour vote in five (19.6 per cent) was cast in the three southern English regions (Eastern, South East, South West) – more than in Scotland and

Wales combined. But the composition of Labour's Parliamentary party is very different – fewer than one Labour MP in twenty represents a seat in southern England outside London.

The Conservative Party in parliament is unrepresentative of its voters, in a mirror image of Labour's distorted representation. Although southern England is its strongest region in votes, this dominance is exaggerated in seats to the extent that a majority of Tory MPs represent seats in southern England.

### The Nations

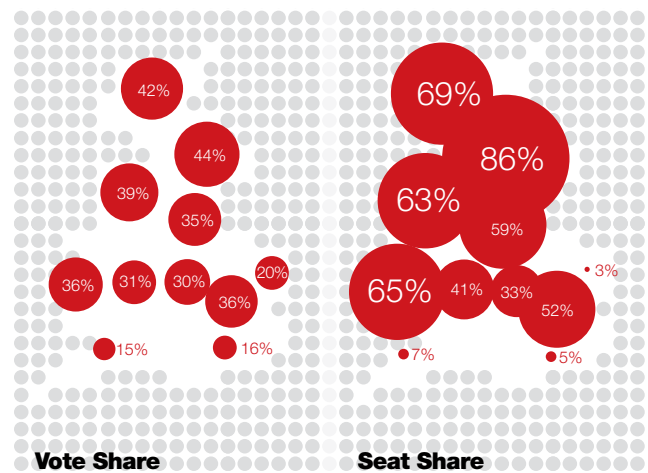
■ The Conservatives 'won' the election in England in the sense that they gained a majority of English seats and had a large lead over Labour in share of the vote. However, their share of the vote was just below 40% and comparable more with their losing performances in 1974 than their 1979-97 ascendancy.

■ The English vote shows signs of fragmenting even further, beyond the three main parties.

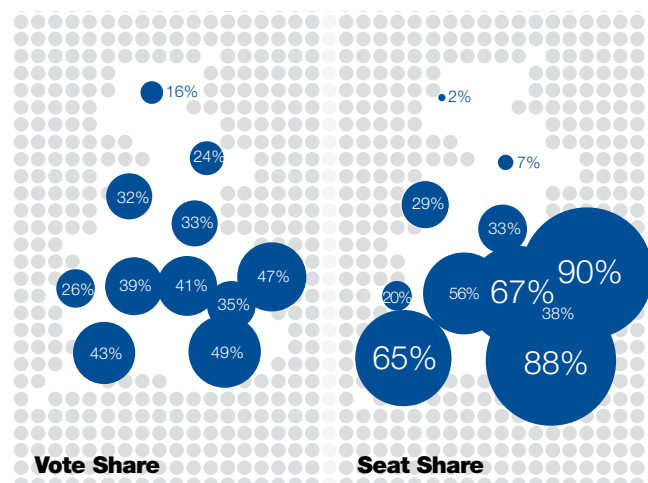
■ Labour consolidated its grip on Scotland, with an increased vote share. Had an all-Conservative government been formed, it would have been in a difficult position because even with a majority it would have had but one MP north of the border (even though the Conservative share of the vote arguably justified more representation).

■ Wales was a bad area for Labour in terms of vote share, but the party maintained a majority of Welsh MPs despite winning 36.2%, a lower share even than 1983.

#### North-South divide Labour



#### North-South divide Conservative

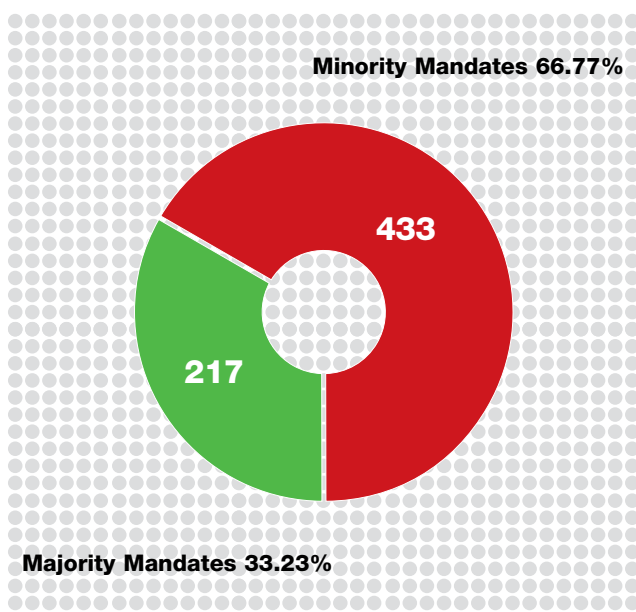


# Collapsing Mandates

**The link between constituency and MP, often cited by supporters of the current system as a benefit of FPTP, has clearly changed not just since the high point of the two party system in the 1950s but also since the 1990s. The normal pattern is now for two MPs out of every three to lack the support of a majority of local voters, and an increasing number not to reach 40 per cent support. No MP returned in any of the last three elections has had the support of a majority of the local electorate.**

The debate over the possibility of moving to the Alternative Vote (AV) was fuelled by the historically low proportion of MPs with a majority mandate in the 2005 parliament, and this factor has grown rather than receded as a result of the election of 2010.

## MPs Mandates 2010



■ Two thirds of MPs elected in 2010 (433, 66.6%) did not have the support of a majority of their electors. The 2010 House of Commons has the lowest share of majority winners of any parliament since at least the 1920s.

■ A record proportion of MPs had less than 40% support from their local voters – 111 failed to meet this threshold. In most previous elections this has been a relatively rare occurrence.

■ The wooden spoon for share of the voters' support goes to Simon Wright, the Lib Dem MP for Norwich South on 29.4% of the vote – although this is more than the recent record low, 26.0% in Inverness in 1992.

■ No MP won the support of a majority of the local electorate, just as in the elections of 2001 and 2005. 35 MPs had the support of more than 40% (up from 3 in 2005).

■ Eight MPs (also up from 3 in 2005) were elected with less than 20% support from their local electorates.

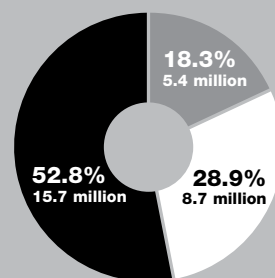
## Wasted votes

■ More than half (52.8%) the votes cast in 2010 were for losing candidates. This is the highest proportion in a recent election, although in most elections since 1974 it has been around 50%.

■ Another 18.9% of the votes cast were surplus to the winners' requirements.

■ While no vote is 'wasted' in that it reflects a democratic expression of opinion by a voter, a very large proportion of votes cast in the 2010 election had no effect on the composition of the House of Commons.

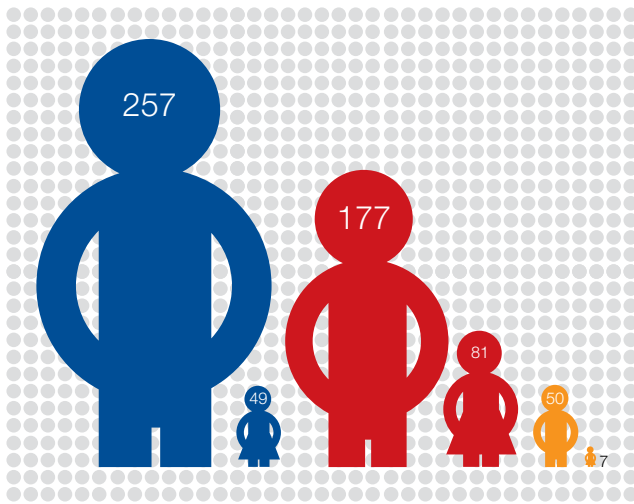
### Votes in 2010 Election



- For losing candidates
- Surplus for winners
- necessary for winners

# Equalities

## Work in Progress



### Gender representation by party

- The 2010 election produced a record number of women MPs – 143, or 22.0%.
- This is, however, poor by international comparison, with over 50 countries having a superior gender balance.
- The number of Conservative women MPs took a significant step forward from 18 (8.6%) to 49 (16%) although Labour retains its majority of women's representation with 81 women MPs (a lower number than in 2005 but at 31.4% a higher proportion).
- Black and minority ethnic MPs also increased in number in 2010, from 15 to 26 (although this is still 4.0% of MPs compared to up to 10% of the population). Labour's number increased to 15 and there was a leap in Conservative BME representation from 2 to 11.
- Breakthroughs in the 2010 election came for Muslim women (three MPs) and people of African heritage (one MP).
- Safe seats limit the opportunities for new blood to enter parliament, but the expenses crisis helped create an unprecedented number of 'vacancies'. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats achieved a rate of 50% women candidates in seats with retirements. In total 152 male and 28 female MPs retired and they were replaced as candidates by their parties with 87 men and 65 women

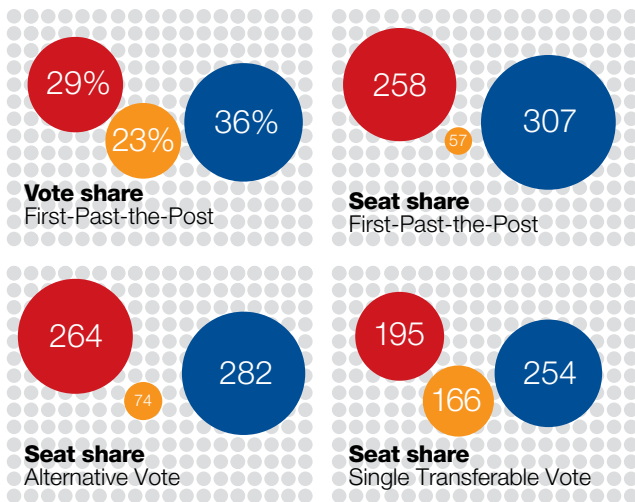
### The Battle for the Marginals

- Most constituencies are safe for one party or another and elections are fought in a relatively small number of marginal seats – about 200 on a generous definition.
- Most safe seats remained safe – of the Labour seats not vulnerable to an 8% swing, the loss rate was 1.5% (three seats), and the loss rate among notionally Conservative seats was similar (three seats).
- The parties devised strategies to appeal to voters in the marginal seats, in the case of the Conservatives to attempt to reverse the bias in the electoral system.
- The Conservatives' sophisticated targeting seems to have produced a very small benefit to them in the marginals. Even after the expenses 'scandal' of 2009, incumbent MPs tended to do much better than candidates replacing an MP who had stood down.
- The Liberal Democrats' strong grasp on targeting, which had doubled their seats on a falling vote in 1997 and produced incremental gains in 2001 and 2005, deserted them in 2010 and they won fewer seats despite the increase in their national vote



# The Parliament that might have been...

The Society has looked at how the election might have been had it been run under alternative systems.



Modeling requires a lot of assumptions. Under FPTP people vote in ways they wouldn't under any other system. For one, many feel obliged to vote tactically.

Preferential systems, like the Alternative Vote (AV) and the Single Transferable Vote (STV) open new realms of possibility, let voters rank their candidates, throwing their initial support behind other parties large and small.

## Conclusions

■ All reformed electoral systems from the Alternative Vote to list PR would have produced results that would have enabled a majority Labour-Lib Dem coalition as well as a majority Conservative-Lib Dem coalition – FPTP was the only system that did not produce this outcome.

■ Proportional systems, as one might expect, would all mean that parties got roughly the same share of seats as votes.

## Kick the Rascals Out!

While power has changed hands, the 2010 election confirmed another surprising fact – that the classical picture of a majority government of one party clearly replacing a majority of the other main party (the basis of the argument that FPTP enables voters to kick out a government) is a very rare event.

Since the mass franchise in 1885, there has only been one such occasion – Edward Heath's singular victory in 1970. All others without exception have involved coalitions, minority government or parliaments with too narrow a majority to allow government for a full term.

### Transfers of power in British government

	Outgoing government		Incoming government	
1905*	Con	Working majority	Lib	Minority
1915*	Lib	Minority	Lib-Con-Lab	Coalition
1922*	Nat Lib-Con	Coalition	Con	Working majority
1924*	Con	Minority	Lab	Minority
1924	Lab	Minority	Con	Working majority
1929	Con	Working majority	Lab	Minority
1931*	Lab	Minority	Con-Lib-Nat Lib	Coalition
1940*	Con	Working majority	Con-Lab-Lib	Coalition
1945	Coalition/caretaker	Coalition	Lab	Working majority
1951	Lab	Inadequate majority	Con	Working majority
1964	Con	Working majority	Lab	Inadequate majority
<b>1970</b>	<b>Lab</b>	<b>Working majority</b>	<b>Con</b>	<b>Working majority</b>
1974	Con	Working majority	Lab	Minority
1979	Lab	Minority	Con	Working majority
1997	Con	Minority	Lab	Working majority
2010	Lab	Working majority	Con-LD	Coalition

\* Transfer of power took place without an election. Elections followed shortly afterwards in 1905-06, 1922 and 1931 which ratified the new governments.

The first transfer in 1924 followed a little after an election; arguably 1974 and 2010, when incumbent governments stayed on for a few days, are comparable.

# The UK General Election 2010

## Facts & figures



6 May 2010

**The Electoral Reform Society is campaigning to change the way we choose our politicians.**

We take our message on fair votes and effective representation to politicians of all parties. *You can help us deliver it.*

**Strong Voters** We want to increase the power of the public in elections by giving everyone a vote that really counts, and choice and competition on polling day.

**Accountable Politicians** Voters need a real link with their representatives, and the chance to hold them to account.

**Popular Government** We want our government elected and supported by the majority of voters, and not the few.

**Mature Politics** We need politics where debate and cooperation takes the place of confrontation and fake theatre.

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