

Briefing on Proportional Representation

Representation of the People Bill, Second Reading briefing

Monday 2nd March 2026

The Representation of the People Bill will bring in once-in-a-generation changes to our democracy – but misses a big opportunity to live up to its name and replace Westminster’s outdated and distorting voting system with fair and proportional elections.

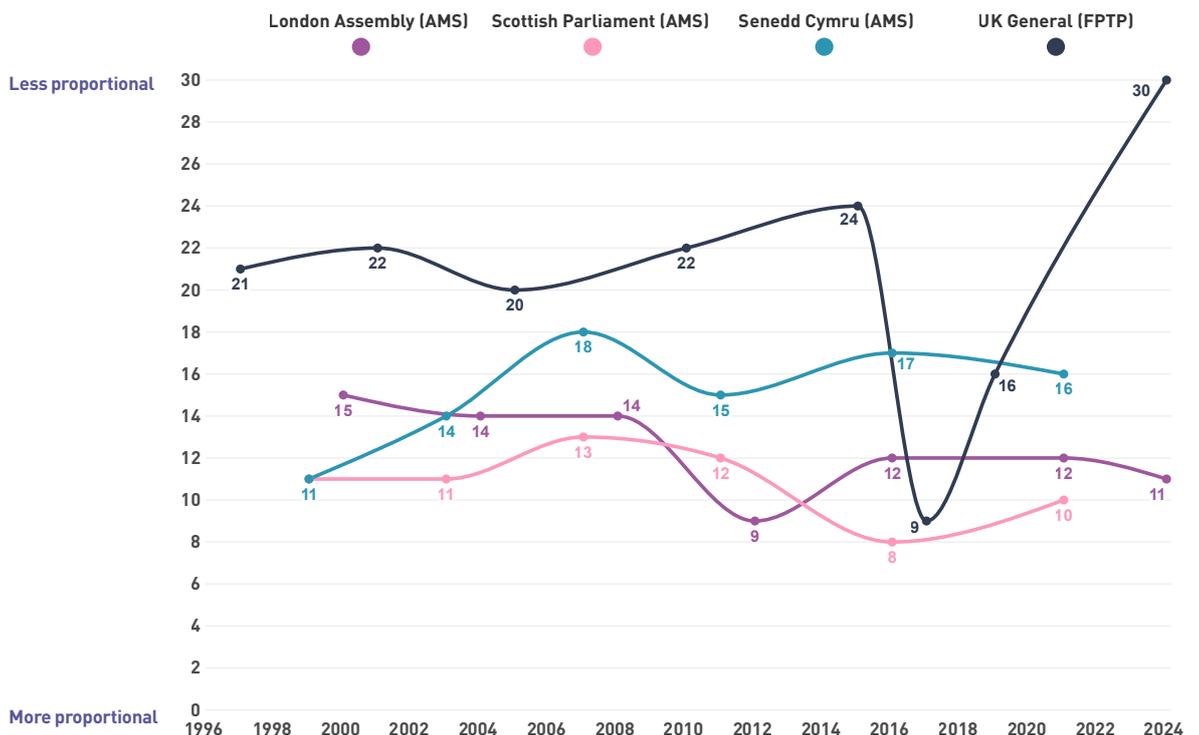
The last general election was the most disproportional in British history. That situation could get worse at the next general election as our two-party system struggles to cope with the new reality of five and six-party politics.

We welcome the government’s move to scrap First Past the Post for mayoral elections, but the same rationale should apply to Westminster elections.

Disproportionality

The General Election in 2024 was not only the most disproportional election in British electoral history but one of the most disproportional seen anywhere in the world.

Disproportionality is measured by a DV (Deviation from Proportionality) score. On the Loosemore-Hanby measure,¹ the 2024 General Election scored 30.1. This beats the previous high score, at the 2015 general election, of 24. But 2024 was also the most disproportional across a range of DV measures.



Multi-party voting

The 2024 General Election was the first in which four parties gained over ten percent of votes and five parties over five percent of votes. Labour and the Conservatives recorded their lowest combined vote share (57.4%) in the era of universal suffrage, with other parties and independents taking over 40 percent of the votes.

Yet First Past the Post is an electoral system designed for a two-party system. When more parties are in contention, as is the case when voters spread their choices across multiple parties, the winner's share of the vote is often reduced. As a result, winning candidates regularly get across the line with less than a majority of votes and occasionally, less than a third of constituency support.

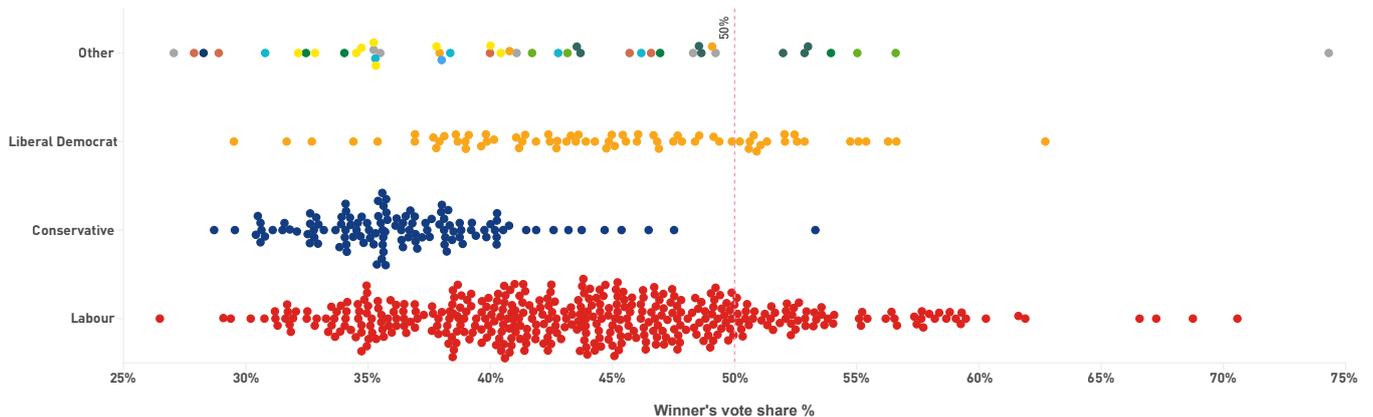


Chart shows the percentage of the vote won by the winning candidate in each constituency, by party. All the dots to the left of the middle line are constituencies won on less than 50% of the vote.

Many more seats are seeing more than two parties get sizable vote shares, which, under FPTP, reduces the eventual mandate for the winning candidate.

Unrepresented voters

Some parties will find their votes piling up in safe seats (surplus votes) and some parties will see more of their vote going to candidates who aren't elected (unrepresented). This is because under First Past the Post, geography plays an outsized role in determining results, rewarding an efficient geographical vote spread over vote share.

In the 2024 General Election, 57.8 percent of voters (16.6 million) were unrepresented, and 15.9 percent of votes (4.6 million) were surplus. That's a total of 73.7 percent of votes disregarded in 2024: **21.2 million votes**. The last time we saw a similar percentage of votes ignored in this way was in 2015 – another election characterised by significant multi-party voting.

Importantly, not all electoral systems treat votes in this way. Some systems take a second or third preference into account if a voter's first preference isn't elected, and others ensure that more preferences count in the first place, sharing seats out proportionally over a larger area.

Developments since the 2024 General Election

Multi-party politics is showing no sign of retreat. The Projected National Share (PNS) calculations from the May 2025 English local elections showed five parties getting over 10% of the vote – another first.²

Sitting alongside this is an increase in, and increased likelihood of representatives being elected with fewer than 30% of votes, under FPTP. In May 2025, two out of four Strategic Authority mayors up for election were returned with the support of fewer than 30% of those who voted. A YouGov MRP in June 2025 predicted a General Election in which record numbers of seats return winners with small proportions of the vote – 143 constituencies are won on less than 30% in their analysis.³

Multi-party politics under FPTP – a system designed for two party competition – is always going to lead to warped electoral outcomes. As the electoral landscape continues to shift, we are likely to see ever more disproportional results. The case for changing the voting system at Westminster has never been clearer – people deserve a parliament that reflects how they have voted.

Electoral Reform Society, 'A System Out of Step', General Election 2024 analysis: <https://electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/a-system-out-of-step-the-2024-general-election/#sub-section-1>

Public Support

According to the most recent British Social Attitudes survey, released in February 2026, the majority of people (53%) in Britain want to change the voting system for general elections and this majority support for change has been seen in every BSA survey since 2021.

A National Commission on Electoral Reform

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Fair Elections has called for a National Commission on Electoral Reform.⁴

The National Commission is a proposal for a time-limited independent review, informed by the evidence of experts and the values of the voting public to consider the criteria for a suitable voting system for Westminster. The Commission would then present Parliament with a set of carefully evidenced recommendations.

This proposal sets out a way to bring in both broad and independent expertise and the views of voters to the question of what type of electoral system we should be using for UK general elections. **This is an urgent question given the unprecedented degree to which multi-party politics now exists in our country.**

Endnotes

1. The Loosemore-Hanby (L-H) index looks at the deviation between each party's vote share and its seat share. If a party obtains 25% of the votes and 20% of the seats, the deviation is 5. The index adds up the absolute values of these deviations across all parties running in the election and divides the total by two. The higher the number the greater disproportionality.
2. BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd925jk27k0o>
3. YouGov, June 2025, MRP. <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/52437-first-yougov-mrp-since-2024-election-shows-a-hung-parliament-with-reform-uk-as-largest-party>
4. APPG for Fair Elections, 'National Commission on Electoral Reform: Terms of Reference', 2025 <https://www.fairelections.uk/national-commission/>