

Should proportional
representation be
introduced in
westminster elections



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The current system under the Westminster elections is first-past-the-post. This is a majoritarian system in that winner-takes-all. Those who are in favour of PR argue that the FPTP system is under-representative towards minor parties and votes are then typically 'wasted'. However those who are in favour of the FPTP system point out that it leads to a strong government, a clear outcome and keeps extremists at bay. Proportional representation is a institution of different electoral systems that produces a government based on the votes of the electorate and is proportion to the seats that the party receives.

This system is different to the current Westminster formula in that the percentage of votes gained is the same as the percentage of seats received. Those who are in favour of a better system for the Westminster elections argue that minor parties like The Liberal Democrats are under represented as they do not achieve much of the vote through the FPTP system. Throughout the years the Labour Party and the Conservatives have been the two dominant parties benefiting from the FPTP system. Places that use PR systems seem to allow better representation for all parties.

The Additional member system is a type of PR that is used in the Scotland elections. In this system the electorate have two votes one for an MSP in their constituency and one for a party in their region. The first vote is done under FPTP the second vote is done under party list, additional members are then allocated to each party. In the 2007 general election of Scotland the Labour Party received better representation from the FPTP constituency vote and received 9 list seats. However the SNP received only 21 constituency

seats under the FPTP system yet they received more seats from the party list (26).

The conservative party were under represented as they received 4 constituency seats and only 13 list seats, this goes against David Cameron's view that proportional representation should not replace the current FPTP system as they received fewer votes from the first vote which is under FPTP and gained more from the party list vote. If PR were to be introduced in the Westminster election then there would be better representation for parties like the Liberal Democrats that have much geographic support as they would receive more votes than what they currently get through the FPTP system.

However those in favour of the current Westminster system believe that the FPTP system keeps extremist parties such as the British National Party at bay as it under represents parties that do not have much support and could cause harm to the political system. Furthermore because the parties could not receive a majority of the votes they failed to form a single government, this meant that a coalition had to be produced.

Under the FPTP system in Westminster Labour and The Conservative party have been dominating the legislature as they have been receiving most of the votes, this produced a strong a stable government. However in the 2010 elections no parties could reach the total number of seats being 326. The party that received most of the votes were The Conservatives with 307 yet they failed to reach the majority. Liberal Democrats and The Conservatives produced a coalition in the UK the second coalition after the post-war consensus.

This shows evidence that the FPTP system is not reliable in that it can still produce a coalition even without the help of PR, making it seem like a broken system. Under the FPTP votes are seen as 'wasted' because of the view that winner-takes-all. People then feel that their votes don't count and so lose trust in the system and do not vote. In PR systems like STV and Party list the votes are of equal value and are redistributed in a way that all votes count. Bringing this in to the Westminster elections could help gain the trust of citizens and so more people will vote.