

Constitutional reform – what the three parties are promising

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The Liberal Democrat surge throws a new spotlight on constitutional reform. [Chris Gilson](#) analyses the top three parties' commitments on introducing changes in their manifestos.

Labour's very limited constitutional reform proposals were largely lost in the 'wash-up' that closed the 2005-10 Parliament. Amongst the top three parties, (and most smaller parties as well), the Conservatives stand alone in setting their faces against any change in House of Commons' elections. However, House of Lords reform, improving the accountability of MPs, better voter registration and new efforts to open the political process are all themes common to each of the three main parties. Comparing by topic, the Table shows the main commitments:

	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats
Reforming elections for the House of Commons	- Supports First Past the Post for Westminster elections	- Referenda by October 2011 on Alternative Vote - Public to be able to petition House of Commons to trigger debates	-Introduce Single Transferrable Vote (STV) system for elections, and multi-member constituencies
Other Commons reform	-Reduce MPs by 10 per cent to 585. - Public to be able to petition House of Commons so as to trigger debates	- Continue with modernizing Commons procedures	- Reduce number of MPs by 150 to 500.
MPs and misconduct	Constituents can recall MPs and force a by-election if MPs are found guilty of wrongdoing	MPs who are found responsible for financial misconduct will be subject to a right of recall, if Parliament itself has failed to act against them.	Constituents can recall MPs and force a by-election if MPs are found guilty of wrongdoing
Voting	Improve voter registration	- Free vote in parliament on lowering voting age to 16 - Improve voter registration	Voting age lowered to 16
Parliamentary Terms	-	Legislation to introduce fixed term parliaments	Introduce fixed term parliaments
Written Constitution	Introduce a UK Sovereignty Bill to limit EU power in the UK	Set up an all party commission on a written constitution	Introduce a written constitution
Human Rights Act	Replace Human Rights Act with UK Bill of Rights	No repeal of Human Rights Act	Protection of Human Rights Act

Looking at the proposal made by each party as a whole:

Labour

- Referendum on Commons and Lords referenda by October 2011 on Alternative vote for Commons and a staged move to a fully elected chamber for the new upper house replacing the Lords
- End to all hereditary peers in the legislature

- Legislation on fixed term parliaments
- Set up an all party commission on creating a written constitution for the UK
- No repeal of the Human Rights Act
- Free vote in parliament on lowering the voting age to 16
- Improve voter registration
- Public to be able to petition House of Commons so as to trigger debates
- MPs who are found responsible for financial misconduct will be subject to a right of recall if Parliament itself has failed to act against them.

Conservatives

- Work towards a 'mainly elected' second chamber to replace House of Lords
- Reduce the number of MPs by 10 per cent, from 650 to 585.
- Supports First Past the Post for Westminster elections
- Introduce a UK Sovereignty Bill to limit the European Union's power in UK
- Replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights
- Improve voter registration
- Public to be able to petition House of Commons to trigger debates
- Constituents can recall MPs and force a by-election if MPs found guilty of wrong-doing

Liberal Democrats

- Introduce the Single Transferrable Vote (STV) system of proportional representation, which requires creating larger multi-member constituencies (3 to 5 times as large)
- At the same time, reduce the number of MPs by 150 to 500
- Introduce fixed term parliaments
- Replace the House of Lords with a smaller and fully elected second chamber
- Introduce a written constitution
- Protect the Human Rights Act
- Voting age should be lowered to 16
- Constituents can recall MPs and force a by-election if MPs are found guilty of wrong-doing