

Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Margetts and Stuart Weir
**The Politico's guide to electoral reform in
Britain**

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THE *Politico's* GUIDE TO
ELECTORAL REFORM
IN BRITAIN

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Inside the back cover there is a map of the Jenkins proposals, showing top-up areas, seats won, etc. See full explanation on the back page opposite.

About this report

This guide is primarily an expert analysis of the electoral and political effects of the scheme proposed by the Independent Commission on the Voting System (the Jenkins Commission) for elections to the House of Commons. It compares the Jenkins scheme, known as AV-Plus, with the current 'first past the post' electoral system, because the Commission's home-grown scheme, known as AV-Plus, will be put to the public as an alternative to first past the post elections in a referendum.

The new scheme could not be introduced until after the next election. The government has not yet announced the date of the referendum, but Lord Jenkins has indicated that he would regard it as a 'betrayal' if it were delayed until after the next general election.

This guide is based on research undertaken by Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts for the Jenkins Commission; previous research on the 1992 and 1997 general elections; and a special study of mixed voting systems. These previous studies were variously commissioned and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, the Economic and Social Research Council, and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

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Dunleavy, Margetts and Weir have collaborated on modelling election results in the United Kingdom since 1991. In 1992, they published the first study, *Replaying the 1992 General Election: how Britain would have voted under alternative electoral systems* (LSE Public Policy Group). In 1997, the Democratic Audit published their follow-up study, *Making Votes Count*, which analysed re-runs of the 1992 and 1997 elections under alternative electoral systems. When it became clear that the Independent Commission was considering a 'mixed' electoral system, the Audit published a further study of the results of such a system as *Making Votes Count 2*. Full details of these and other election studies will be found in the references on page 62.

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This report would not have been possible without the help and assistance of a wide range of people since 1991. First, we are very grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for funding both the ICM public opinion surveys on which the 1997 studies are based and the extensive computer analysis involved. (The ESRC Award Number was N000222253.) The 1992 research was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

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Commission – for Scotland, Professor David Denver, University of Lancaster; for Wales, Dr Barry Jones, University of Wales, Cardiff; for Northern Ireland, Dr Sidney Elliot, Queen's, Belfast, and Professor Brendan O'Leary, LSE.

We are grateful to Paul Laughlin, of RTE Dublin, for permission to use data collected by Ulster Marketing Surveys Ltd on voters' second and subsequent preferences in the 1998 Northern Ireland Assembly election, and to Richard Moore of UMS for his help in supplying the data.

Jane Pugh, of the LSE Geography Drawing Office, designs and produces the excellent maps which lend focus and colour to our reports. Tony Garrett designed and produced this report with his usual skill.

Patrick Dunleavy,
Helen Margetts,
Stuart Weir

November 1998

INTRODUCTION

On 29 October 1998, the Independent Commission on the Voting System (the Jenkins Commission) proposed radical change in the way Britain elects the House of Commons. The Commission, chaired by Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, recommended a two-vote mixed electoral system, AV-Plus, as the best alternative for Britain to the current 'first past the post' (FPTP), or plurality-rule, system for general elections. This 'home-made' system, AV-Plus, was designed to meet the four criteria laid down for the Commission by the government – that the alternative system they recommended should offer *greater voter choice*, deliver *stable government*, maintain the *link between MPs and local constituencies*, and produce *broadly proportional results*.

The Commission's AV-Plus scheme belongs to the broad family of mixed electoral systems, generally known as additional member systems (AMS), but has been designed to build on features of the existing FPTP system and British political culture. In particular, to keep strong local links and make it possible for the larger political parties still to win a working majority of seats in the House of Commons on a minority of the popular vote. This objective is dictated in part by the aversion to coalition government

which is a significant element in Britain's political culture. Indeed, the Commission specifically says that it does not wish to impose 'a coalition habit' on the country.

This report analyses the major features of the AV-Plus system which the Commission has recommended should be put to the British public in a referendum as an alternative to first past the post voting. We compare AV-Plus with first past the post, but not with standard alternative voting systems (for which see our previous writings); show how AV-Plus would have worked in 1992 and 1997 in some detail, including the degree of distortion in its results; and provide a broad assessment of its likely electoral effects.

Jenkins in a nutshell

Under the Commission's scheme, AV-Plus, most MPs – 80 to 85 per cent – would continue to be elected in local constituencies, which would be rather larger than now. Electors would cast their first vote for a constituency candidate under the alternative vote (AV) system, not FPTP as in the AMS schemes for Scotland, Wales and the London Assembly (as well as AMS systems abroad). Under AV, voters number the candidates in order of preference on their ballot papers. If a candidate gets a majority of first-pref-

erence votes, he or she is elected. Otherwise, the bottom-placed candidate is eliminated and his or her second-preference votes are distributed among the other candidates, and this process continues from the bottom up until one candidate secures a simple majority of votes.

In addition, electors would cast a second 'party' vote for some 98 to 132 top-up MPs (15 to 20 per cent of the total in the House of Commons). The Commission leaves open exactly what the final proportion of top-up MPs to local members should be. The purpose of the additional layer of MPs is to reduce the inevitable disproportionality of the local election results. The more top-up MPs there are, the more accurately the composition of the House of Commons would reflect voters' wishes; the 'classic' AMS scheme has equal numbers of local and top-up MPs and achieves close to pure proportionality. At the same time, there would be fewer local MPs serving larger constituencies if the size of the Commons is held constant (as Jenkins intends it should be).

Under Jenkins, the top-up MPs would not be elected nationally or regionally, as under most proportional representation (PR) systems, but from counties and equivalent-sized metropolitan districts in England, Scottish and Welsh Euro-constituency areas, and two top-up areas in Northern Ireland. There would be 80 top-up areas in total – 65 in England, eight in Scotland, five in Wales and two in Northern Ireland. Of these areas, 44 would have a single top-up MP and

the remaining 36 – in London, central Scotland and large metropolitan areas, as well as the two Northern Ireland areas – would each elect two top-up MPs.

The choice of locally identifiable top-up areas is a significant innovation. It is designed both to reduce central party control of the choice of candidates and their place on the party lists, and to provide both local accountability and a broad local link for top-up MPs.

Local AV elections, plus the corrective top-up mechanism, will, the Commission argues, substantially increase voter choice. Voting under AV for local candidates frees voters from having to face the 'tactical vote' choice between their first-preference candidate or party and the most acceptable of the candidates likely to win the seat. They can vote in order of preference, knowing that their second and third preference votes may still count if their first-preference candidate is knocked out. The second party vote also helps voters to avoid the same sort of dilemma. The Commission also insists that party lists in the second ballot should be 'open', not 'closed', thus giving voters the choice of either a straight party vote or a vote for a specific individual candidate on the list.

The Commission's report states that elections by the alternative vote will ensure that all constituency members have majority support in their constituencies – which is not now the case with over 40 per cent of existing MPs. However, there are major objec-

tions to their choice. First, AV can produce considerably more disproportional results than FPTP, as indeed it would have done had it been in use alone in 1997. Secondly, critics – who include Lord Alexander, a Commission member – object that it gives too much weight to ‘lower grade’ second, third and perhaps further choices.

The Commission also makes an important recommendation on one cause of bias in current electoral arrangements. Strictly speaking, it would be possible to achieve some sort of parity between voters in different constituencies if they were all of a broadly equal size. But the UK has four Boundary Commissions, one for each of the ‘home countries’ and they apply quite different ‘electoral quotas’ to determine the size of constituencies; and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all entitled to a minimum number of constituencies – which for instance means that Scotland’s quota is 20 per cent lower than that for English constituencies. These inequalities make for greater disproportion in election results.

The government has already decided that the Scottish Commission will be able to ignore the quota for Scotland. To reduce bias, the Jenkins Commission recommends that there should be a single electoral quota for the UK as a whole. The Commission also proposes that, as far as possible, the ratio of constituency to top-up MPs should be equal in the four nations of the United Kingdom.

The Commission makes several other major proposals, including the

establishment of a new independent Electoral Commission, to oversee electoral administration and referendums. It accepts that AV-Plus could not be introduced until after the next election and recommends that if the scheme is put in place, it should be reviewed only after two elections have taken place and that any fundamental change, such as a change in the ratio of top-up MPs to local members or a return to FPTP, should not be introduced without a further referendum.

Overall, the Commission has given priority to two main elements of the existing system – locally-based MPs and single-party government – over the criterion of ‘broad proportionality’ while extending voter choice. This priority is evident in the Commission’s own summary:

‘Our recommendation would have produced single party majority Government in three out of the last four elections, with the only exception [1992] being a parliament which, even under the old system, exhibited many of the features of uncertain command. It is therefore difficult to argue that what we propose is a recipe either for a predominance of coalitions or for producing a weakness of government authority’

FIRST PAST THE POST

As the public will be invited to choose between AV-Plus and the existing system in the proposed referendum, it is important to discuss and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of first past the post (FPTP) elections, or the plurality-rule system (to use the correct name).

A primary duty of any electoral system is that it should represent the votes – or wishes – of the electorate as effectively as possible. The key criticism of plurality-rule in Britain is that the shares of seats in the House of Commons which the political parties receive are quite different from their shares of the popular vote in general elections. Further, the relationship between seat shares and vote shares changes markedly from one election to the next. It is often said that the results are unfair between parties – some parties get large returns in seats for relatively few votes, others may collect a significant overall vote, but receive very few seats at all. But as the Jenkins report states, ‘the major “unfairness” count against FPTP is that it distorts the desires of voters’ (para 6).

Deviation from proportionality in 1992 and 1997

In institutional terms, the British system is not ‘proportional’. But how exactly should we measure ‘propor-

tionality’? Political scientists have developed many different possible indicators of electoral system performance, but serious comparative work on electoral systems has tended to focus on the concept of ‘deviation from proportionality’. Table 1 shows how we calculated deviation from proportionality (DV) in the 1997 general election in Great Britain. (We exclude Northern Ireland here because it has a quite separate party system.)

Table 1: Deviation from proportionality in the 1997 election

<i>Party</i>	<i>% votes (1)</i>	<i>% seats (2)</i>	<i>deviations (1)-(2)</i>
Conservatives	31.4	25.7	– 5.7
Labour	44.4	65.4	+ 21.0
Liberal Democrat	17.2	7.2	– 10.0
Scottish National Party	2.0	0.9	– 1.1
Plaid Cymru	0.5	0.6	+ 0.1
Referendum Party	2.7	0	– 2.7
Others	1.7	0.2	– 1.5
Total	100	100	
Total deviations (ignoring + or – signs)			42.1
DV score = total deviations/2			21%
Largest deviation (for Labour)			21%

We simply subtract the percentage of seats a party gained in the Commons from its percentage vote share to give a deviation for each party. Then we add up the deviations for all parties (discarding their plus or mi-

nus signs, which would otherwise mean that they cancel each other out) and divide by 2. This gives a deviation from proportionality (DV) score of 21 per cent for the 1997 general election.

This figure can be simply understood as the fraction of MPs who are not entitled to their seats in the legislature in terms of their party's national share of the vote. Under a pure proportional representation system, then, over one fifth of seats would switch to a different party – a score which has been much the same in most elections since the mid-1970s, when substantial Liberal and other third party voting became an established feature of British politics. The DV score for the 1997 Labour landslide is slightly below the 1983 deviation from proportionality score of 23 per cent, when Margaret Thatcher won a large majority over Michael Foot's divided Labour party.

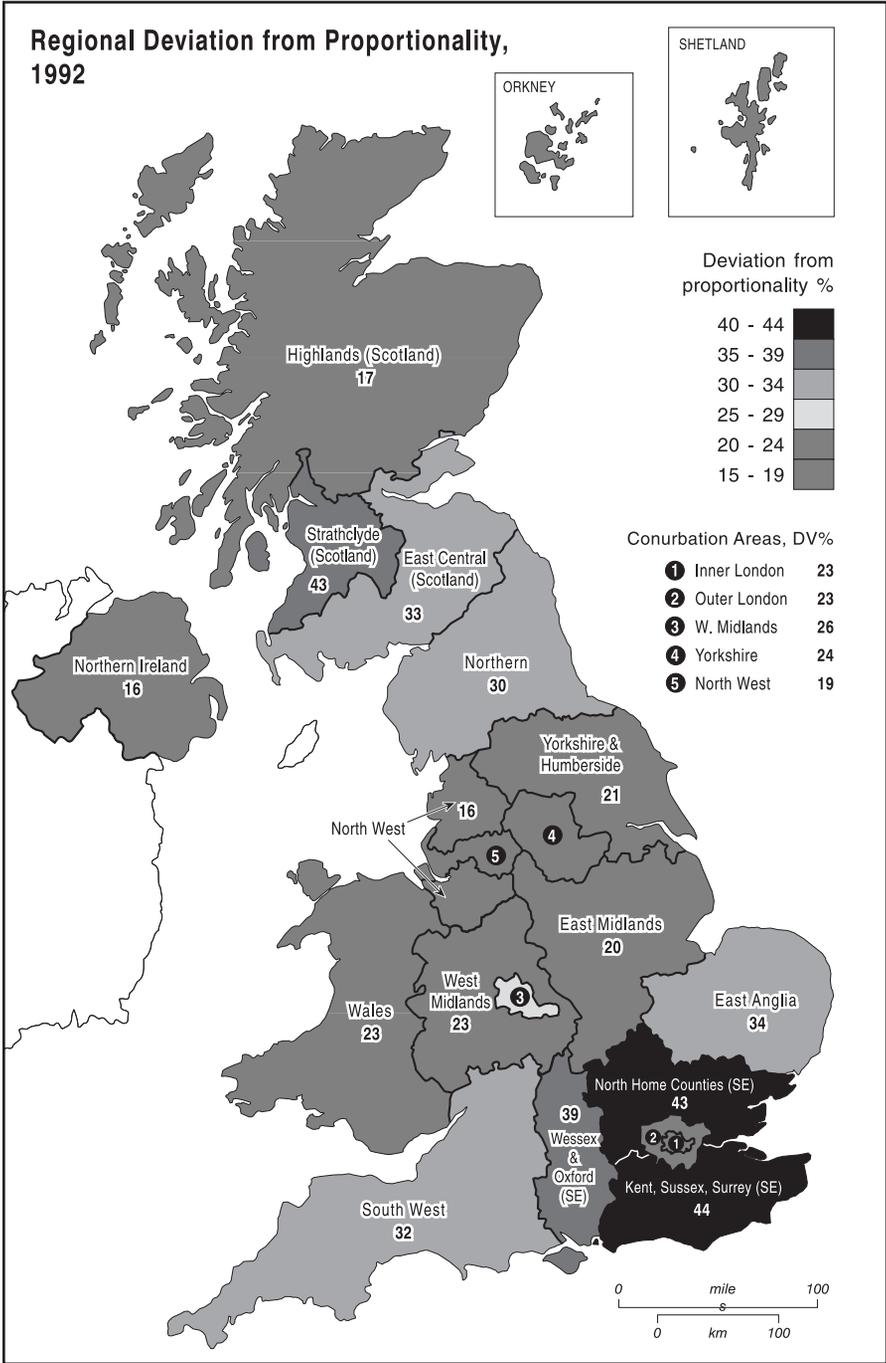
The almost unique feature in Table 1, however, is that Labour's gains (its huge 'winner's bias') did not come solely from third parties, but in large part also from the under-representation of the Conservatives – only the third time since 1918 that they have obtained fewer seats than their share of the votes, the other occasions being in 1945 and (marginally) in 1966. The Liberal Democrats were the most under-represented party in 1997, but in fact they did relatively well by comparison with the past. In most elections since 1970, the party has achieved only 3 per cent of seats, whatever its share of the vote – even

when, as the Liberal-Social Democrat Alliance, it gained 26 per cent support in 1983.

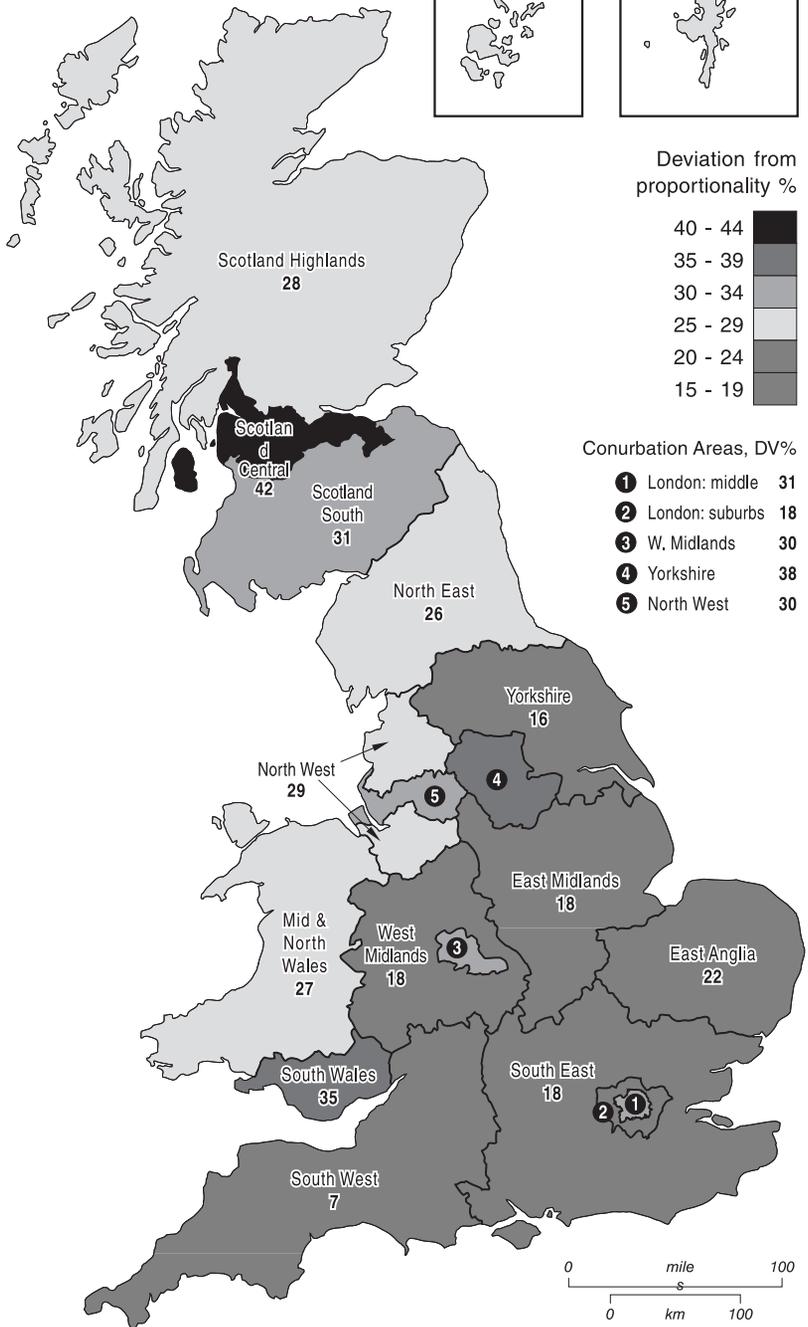
The British deviation from proportionality score has been among the largest recorded amongst liberal democracies for the last 25 years. In western Europe, proportional representation systems commonly achieve scores of 4-8 per cent – a level only briefly recorded in Britain during the two-party era of the 1950s. Similarly in the USA, where there is a perfect two-party system in Congressional elections, the deviation from proportionality is very stable at around 7 per cent. So the British system is broadly three times worse at translating votes into seats accurately than the main countries against which we tend to measure our democracy. The major countries which still achieve high deviation scores like Britain's are former imperial territories which retain plurality-rule elections, especially Canada, Malaysia and India.

However, even the deviation from proportionality score for Britain as a whole does not tell the whole story. This figure is almost always misleadingly low if compared with other countries, because areas of pro-Conservative deviation in the south-east are partly offset by areas of pro-Labour deviation in Scotland and the north. In 1992, the national DV score was just 17.4 per cent, but far higher scores than this were common in most regions. Across south-east England the Conservatives won 97 per cent of seats in 1992 on the basis of 55 per cent of the votes (leaving all other

Regional Deviation from Proportionality, 1992



Regional Deviation from Proportionality, 1997



parties virtually unrepresented). So the deviation from proportionality in the south-east was 43 per cent – just about as high as it is possible to get inside a liberal democracy (see 1992 map). In 1997, the DV score was higher than the national level of 21 per cent in 12 of 18 regions (see 1997 map). In central Scotland, another very high DV score (42 per cent) reflected the Labour party's unfair political domination (although with fewer seats at stake than in south-east England).

Thus British voters experience an electoral system which is far more unfair than the national figure would suggest – on average, the votes of more than one in four voters (28 per cent) did not count in 1992 when it came to the allocation of seats in the House of Commons. In 1997, the erosion in Conservative voting and the Liberal Democrat breakthrough in south-west England reduced high DV scores in critical southern areas where there is a large number of seats, but still nearly one in four voters (23 per cent) found that the electoral system ignored their votes in allocating seats. Only in south-west England did first past the post deliver reasonably proportional results – a surprising outcome given the fairly even three-way split of votes in that region in 1997.

Electoral deserts

Scrutiny of regional voting patterns in 1997 reveals one major element in the poor electoral performance of the Conservatives. Overall, their vote

slumped from 43 per cent in 1992 to just over 31 per cent – and the plurality-rule system tends to discriminate heavily against parties whose support falls below about a third. In 11 out of the 18 regions we used in our 1997 election analysis, the Conservatives fell badly below the 33 per cent mark, and they were ahead of Labour in only three regions (south-east and south-west England and East Anglia).

A further sign of their crisis was the growth of regions where the Conservatives gained no MPs at all (as in Scotland and Wales) or hardly any MPs (as in all the great urban areas of England). For the Jenkins report, these 'electoral deserts' represent a major failing of first past the post elections. The report points out that Labour experienced a similar fate in the 1980s, being excluded from the more rapidly growing and prosperous southern half of the UK. South of a line from the Wash to the Severn estuary, there were only three Labour seats outside London in both 1983 and 1987; and no predominantly rural constituencies in England elected a Labour MP. The report is highly critical of the 'geographically divisive' effects of FPTP, commenting that 'such apartheid in electoral outcome is a heavy count against the system which produces it. It is a new form of Disraeli's two nations' (para 31).

It is the same properties of FPTP which tend to make it hard to allow third party support to express itself. As we have shown, the rise in electoral support for the Liberals and their successor parties which has de-stabi-

lised plurality-rule elections since the 1970s has not been rewarded with an equal rise in their representation in Parliament. Plurality-rule elections work in two-party political systems, as in the USA, but Britain has now ceased to be a two-party system. By 1974, the low Liberal shares of the vote common in the 1950s heyday of two-party politics had grown to nearly 20 per cent of the popular vote, but the Liberals still won only 2.2 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons. In 1983, the Alliance got only 3.5 per cent of the seats after winning 26 per cent of the vote. Even in 1997, with all the benefit of tactical voting, it still got only 7 per cent of the seats for nearly 17 per cent of the vote (see Table 1).

The virtues and vices of FPTP

The Jenkins report seeks to summarise the virtues and vices of the plurality-rule system. The report lists its virtues as follows:

- It is said to be familiar and simple to use.
- It gives each MP a direct relationship with a particular geographical area and encourages them to try to serve all their constituents well, however partisan they may be at Westminster.
- It usually (though not invariably) leads to single-party government and this outcome may be seen as assisting quick decisions and sustained policy lines.
- It enables the electorate sharply and cleanly to rid itself of an un-

wanted government.

- It offers unorthodox MPs a degree of independence from excessive party control, provided (as many do) that they can retain the support of their local party.

Its deficiencies (or vices) derive, the report states, from its natural tendency to disunite rather than to unite the country. The report lists the following vices:

- FPTP exaggerates movements of opinion and, when they are strong, produces mammoth majorities in the House of Commons (for Labour in 1945, 1966 and 1997; for the Tories, in 1959, 1983 and 1987). Landslide majorities do not, in general, conduce to the effective working of the House of Commons.
- Recent large majorities have been secured with smaller percentages of the popular vote in 1987 and 1997 than in the 1940s and 1950s, largely because third parties have taken larger shares of the vote.
- Third parties are however grossly under-represented in Parliament unless they have a relatively narrow focus, like Plaid Cymru and (less markedly) the SNP. Thus perversely, third parties with a broader appeal – a ‘favourable factor from the point of view of national cohesion’ – are heavily discouraged.
- FPTP creates ‘electoral deserts’ (see above).
- FPTP narrows the terrain over which the political battle is fought, by creating an essential election contest

in about 100-150 marginal in normal circumstances. Many voters in 'safe' seats may thus pass their entire adult lives without ever voting for a winning candidate or even influencing a result. This has a knock-on effect on turnout at elections.

● At local level MPs are increasingly returned to Westminster on a minority vote. In the 1950s, some 14 per cent of MPs won their seats on less than 50 per cent of the local vote. In the two 1990s elections, the figure has risen to 44 per cent – nearly half of all MPs.

● There is 'some, but not overwhelmingly strong evidence' that FPTP is less good at producing parliamentary representation for women and for ethnic minorities than are most proportional systems.

The perverse effects of FPTP are proliferating fast (see *Political Power and Democratic Control in Britain*, Stuart Weir and David Beetham, Routledge 1998, pp. 54-5). The Jenkins report cites two – in 1951, Labour lost the election even though they out-pollled the Conservatives and actually won a majority of the popular vote; in February 1974, the Conservatives won most votes but Labour took power with more seats.

The Jenkins arguments in perspective

The Jenkins report is clearly anxious to appease pro-FPTP sentiment in its summary of the system's virtues and vices, while concluding that the case for it has to be tested against a very

substantial list of deficiencies. This approach underpins its essential case for AV-Plus – which is presented as a compromise between FPTP and a more pluralist and proportional alternative. The compromise approach is built into the very criteria which framed the Commission's inquiries: the criteria of 'stable government' and the 'constituency link' serve as a political code for the current system; and 'voter choice' and 'broadly proportional' for more pluralist systems.

But the Commission's attempt to provide a balance of argument for and against plurality-rule means that the report fails to subject the virtues which it lists to thorough analysis – though they are noted elsewhere in passing – and curiously understates the major structural fault of FPTP under contemporary British conditions. This fault renders it unfit for further service. As we shall argue, like the royal yacht *Britannia*, our electoral system is obsolete.

First, the MP's constituency link. There is no doubt about the huge increase in correspondence between MPs and their constituents, both over political issues nationally and locally, and constituents' own problems. But the closeness of the MP-constituency link is usually exaggerated and the Jenkins report tends to take it at face value. Opinion polls suggest, for example, that only about half the population can name their MP and a major study, published in 1992, found that only about one in ten people had contacted their MP in the previous five years. Considerably more people

take their problems to local councillors. Further, the idea that MPs are dependent on their constituents rather than on their parties is a political myth. Party loyalty by MPs to their party, in government or opposition, is the keystone of their political role and determines all or most of their conduct.

The role of MPs as 'problem-solvers' has not been closely studied. It is not known whether they provide an effective service to the minority of people who approach them. But it is almost certainly patchy, and probably less effective than that which expanded and more accessible Ombudsman services, as well as a well-resourced network of Citizen's Advice Bureaus, could provide.

There are other considerations too which arise from confusions about the indeterminate role of MPs. The evidence is that backbench MPs are grossly over-stretched and many turn to 'constituency work' as a tangible satisfaction in a badly-defined and often frustrating career. Former Labour MP John Garrett suggests that whips, ministers and civil servants encourage MPs to act as local advocates because they know that constituency overload can drive out persistent scrutiny; and critics of the Commons, such as Kate Jenkins, are scornful anyway about the ability of MPs properly to perform their duty to make the executive accountable.

Finally, the advent of devolved government in London, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and at least the prospect of regional government in

England means that the local and welfare roles of MPs is set to diminish. None of this is meant to deny the value of a local link for MPs, but simply to warn against giving it undue prominence and to signal the need to ensure that MPs perform their wider duties more effectively. Here Jenkins does usefully suggest that top-up MPs might take a greater interest in the scrutiny of legislation, which is notoriously badly performed by existing constituency MPs.

The Jenkins report does question the idea that single-party government is the traditional norm in British politics and considers evidence from a few chosen countries, notably Ireland and Germany, which can be shown to have achieved stable government and notable economic growth in the postwar period. So far as tradition is concerned, the report points out that for 43 of the past 150 years, Britain has been governed by overt coalitions; for another 34 years the government of the day depended on the votes of one or more other parties; and for another nine a government technically holding an overall majority actually had an uncertain command over the House, the most recent example being John Major's 1992-97 government. Thus, for more than half of this period, Britain has not been ruled by the traditionally strong single-party government which FPTP seeks to produce; and the Commission argues that British history shows that single-party government is not a necessary prerequisite for effective action.

However, the report fails to challenge the strongly-held idea that coalition government is necessarily weaker and less desirable than single-party government, to subject it to rigorous analysis, and to review the experience of coalition government in more than a few western democracies. We briefly do so in the next section of this report.

There are two further weaknesses in the Jenkins approach. The first is that, by default, it does not fully examine the claim that is often made that the British electorate has direct control over the process of forming governments in the United Kingdom, and endorses the view that the electoral system 'enables the electorate sharply and cleanly to rid itself of an unwanted government'. The weakness of both claims is that the 'electorate' evidently does no such thing. Certainly voters do have a direct say in the formation and dismissal of governments, but it is a minority of voters which performs the first function, and a government can continue in office against the wishes of the majority at election after election. The 'electorate' is a political phantom. On the only occasion on which a majority of the electorate voted in postwar Britain for a particular party to hold power, in 1951, that party lost the election and the party with fewer votes was returned to power. Could it really be said with any degree of truth or logic that the 'electorate' had spoken?

Thereafter every government has been elected on a minority of the popular vote: so it is a minority of the

electorate that actually makes – and unmakes – governments in the UK. Mrs Thatcher's governments in the 1980s, all-powerful politically, were all returned on minority votes of something over 40 per cent in turn, and 'unwanted' by nearly 60 per cent of the electorate. The fact is that the desires of the electorate are distorted in the first instance by the unrepresentative nature of the results of the electoral system itself, and then further distorted by the supreme power which the political system confers upon the leading party (or not) once it has won its majority.

Finally, it ought to be acknowledged, as US politics constantly reminds us, that first-past-the-post elections *can* deliver very reasonably proportional results time after time. In the United States, only 7 per cent of members of the House of Representatives are elected for parties who are not entitled to their seats in terms of their share of the national vote (comparable to the best European PR systems, which hit between 4-8% on the same 'deviation from proportionality' score). And virtually all US Representatives enjoy clear majority support in their districts. But the USA is the *only* large country where first-past-the-post elections work in this way, because it is the only perfect two-party system in the world. Everywhere else in liberal democracies party support is fragmenting over time, and first-past-the-post elections cannot cope.

In Canada the system is now dangerously erratic, projecting the

Conservatives at the last election from having a Parliamentary majority to holding just three seats. In India first-past-the-post means that party seat shares also yo-yo dramatically with small shifts in votes, and enormous local and regional corruption has been stimulated by the strong electoral insulation of MPs. In Malaysia the system supports a regime where executive power has become unstable and civil rights are in jeopardy. And these are now the only substantial countries that still use the British system.

In Britain, as we have seen, the disproportionality score is commonly three times higher than in the USA; and only just over half of all MPs enjoy majority support from their constituents. These are poor levels of electoral legitimacy. But there is a strong structural reason for these major deficiencies. Since 1972, thousands of opinion polls, 26 years of municipal elections, four Euro-elections, and seven successive general elections have shown one fifth or more of the vote going to third and fourth parties – to the Liberal Democrats, to the SNP in Scotland and Plaid Cymru in Wales, or to the Greens (notably in the 1989 Euro elections). In 1997, a record-breaking 4.4 per cent of the vote even went to fifth and sixth parties (such as the Referendum Party and the UK Independence Party). And in Northern Ireland, the previous umbilical connection to the mainland party system has been completely severed: in the PR 1998 Assembly elections 12

parties obtained significant vote shares.

Most media commentators and many academics are blind to the new structure of British politics. In their minds politics is still a two-party affair. Like first-past-the-post itself, they treat all the voters for third parties with contempt. Liberal Democrat arguments for fairness for their voters and party are dismissed as special pleading. But they will have to open their eyes and minds sooner rather than later. For the former Roy Jenkins's 'mould' really *is* broken. The structural changes which prevent the system from more accurately reflecting the choices that people actually make are not going to go away. The consistent voting patterns and trends of the last 28 years will not suddenly go into reverse. We live in a post-modern age, and the former two-party politics of Britain will go on being fractured – indeed, the fracturing will take worse forms if voting reform is delayed. If the electoral system stays unchanged, it can only be a matter of a few years after 2001 before the proportionally elected Scottish Parliament will so dominate electoral legitimacy in Scotland that the Commons is reduced to a farce in Scottish eyes, and the ratchet for Scottish independence will take a further powerful turn.

In the last 15 years Britain has become a more middle class society; years in school have lengthened; and the numbers of graduates have soared – all factors that used to predict greater election turnout. But overall

turnout has stubbornly not increased – instead it plunged in the 1997 general election by six percentage points to a postwar low. Voting in the 1998 municipal elections fell back by a staggering 10 to 15 percentage points right across the country, and dramatically in Labour heartlands. The underlying propensity to vote in Britain is in decline, with serious effects in inner-city areas. Turnout level will not easily be rebuilt, and could all too easily spiral further downwards. Jenkins identifies the elements of the structural causes of the higher levels of distortion in Britain's elections to Parliament, but fails explicitly to nail his significant proposals for reform to a structural shift in British politics which will not fade away.

COALITION GOVERNMENT

Here we briefly review the general state of knowledge about single party and coalition government, focusing on the arguments that coalition governments deprive electors of effective choice of and control over government and are less effective than single-party governments. The trouble is that debate in Britain assumes that there is a sharp distinction between single party and coalition governments; and that proportional representation and coalition government are a uniform political phenomenon. Thus, opponents of PR can argue both that coalition governments are inherently unstable (citing Italy) and too stable (citing Germany). The fact is that there are many different kinds of coalition in western Europe alone. Some are more effective than others. Some emerge clearly from electoral verdicts, others do not.

There are general truths about most proportional systems. By their very nature, they generally reflect the wishes of voters far more accurately than the British system does; and those systems which employ party lists do generally give central party organisations a greater degree of control over the selection of candidates than is considered appropriate in the United Kingdom. But different systems produce different results and in this brief review we will concentrate

on electoral and political effects which are relevant to the Jenkins choice, AV-Plus, which is for example deliberately designed to minimise central party control over the choice of candidates.

The idea of the party mandate

A major justification for FPTP in Britain is that single-party governments, even though elected on a minority vote, can deliver on the programmes that they put to the electorate because their artificial majority in the House gives them the power to deliver on their mandate. The party mandate thus offers a mechanism for linking electoral preferences to government action through the central party role in both. We should note the positive side of mandate arrangements, even when they do rest on a plurality rather than a majority of the vote. They have two interrelated strengths:

- electors know what they are voting for and can cast their vote so as to enhance the chance of their preferred party forming the government and carrying through its programme
- the election result does secure the electoral choice of at least the largest minority among the electorate.

However, the mandate idea under FPTP involves often unexamined deficiencies. The full operation of the mandate really demands that Parlia-

ment be totally subordinate to the government formed by the majority party. All opposition parties can or should do is try to rally popular support for alternative programmes in light of the next election. Attempts to give Parliament real powers of investigation or control subvert the idea of the mandate. But should Parliament not consist of more than a venue for the debate between government and opposition, designed to influence the next election? This idea is all the more questionable because the government only has a plurality of votes – nowadays as little as 42 or 43 per cent – which only the operation of FPTP transforms into a legislative majority. Thus, it can well be argued that a popular majority has voted *against* the party which forms the government – and the mandate which it is empowered to push through Parliament.

By definition, where parties can rarely hope to form a single-party government, as in most countries with PR elections, the parties with different programmes coming together after an election to form a coalition do not seem to have a mandate in the same sense, even if they can agree on a common programme (we shall see they often can). However, the majority often seems ‘manufactured’ in the sense that one or even all of the partners may have lost votes in the election and still form a government; and also in the sense that it may be the product of unseen political dealings.

Yet most countries using PR systems do have something like mandate

arrangements, though less so in fragmented systems with larger numbers of parties. The most obvious case is where parties form explicit electoral alliances before the election. As the Social Democrats and Greens have just done in Germany, the allies proclaim their intention of serving together in government if they win the election. Sometimes they even issue a common ‘Programme of Government’ so electors know what government policies they are voting for. Thus, election alliances can substitute quite effectively for single parties, particularly if one alliance of parties is lined up against another, so electors are able to choose between two clear-cut opposing alternatives. Such alliances have been common in Germany, where the Free Democrats have generally formed an alliance with one or other of the two larger parties, the Christian or Socialist Democrats. They also occur in Ireland, though not so frequently, with Fine Gael and Labour allied against Fianna Fail. In Sweden and Norway the ‘bourgeois’ parties usually state their intention of forming a government together if they get a majority.

In other countries, all the parties of the left join forces against an alliance of all the right-wing parties, with the intention of producing either a left or a right government depending on which *tendance* gets a popular majority. In this case, electors have a choice between left and right priorities, though it is not always clear exactly which parties will be in and out of government. In Norway and Sweden,

the contest is essentially between the bourgeois, centre-right alliance, and the left, represented by Social Democrats or Labour, the large party, and small left-socialist or Communist parties. If the left gets a majority a single-party Social Democratic or Labour government will form, supported by the smaller left party. The outcome of the vote is blurred a little by the question of which bourgeois government will form in the case of a centre-right majority – which may not always include all the allied parties.

An academic study of the influence of electors over the making of governments between 1950-90 in 16 nations found that electors determined the formation of nearly every government in countries using plurality-rule elections – the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (to 1994). But they also determined the making of most governments in Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Norway and (just) Denmark and exercised partial control over most others.

On the positive side, coalition governments are likely to include the 'middle party' which represents the 'average' elector, and to avoid putting government in the hands of a fairly extreme plurality, which the majority might even be said to oppose. The problem for FPTP in Britain, based on a plurality rather than a real majority of the popular vote, is that it cannot guard against this happening (as in the 1980s). Thus coalitions are generally more likely to satisfy a wider concept of representation, or voter

choice, than the classic mandate theory – particularly as the coalition will come closer to representing the choices of voters from parties excluded from government than single-party plurality rule. Further, formal electoral alliances of two or more parties do offer electors a clear choice between two different programmes and usually produce a government with a genuine majority. This is secured, however, by party strategies and behaviour, not by formal constitutional arrangements

Further research by political scientists like Professor Ian Budge, of the University of Essex, has shown that coalitions do not make it harder for parties to keep their commitments, owing to agreements among the partners which let each pursue their own differing priorities. A comparative study in ten liberal democracies of the relationship between election priorities and government spending found that coalitions in Germany, Sweden and Austria were more likely to stick closer to their manifesto priorities than single-party governments in Britain, Australia and the USA, while also satisfying a broader section of society than UK governments are able to do (see further *Stability and Choice: a review of single party and coalition government*, by Ian Budge, Democratic Audit Paper No. 15, 1998).

AV-Plus is designed to avoid some of the disadvantages of coalition politics, as seen from a British perspective, though as we have seen, these can be greatly exaggerated. The fact that it is partially rather than fully propor-

tional means that coalition governments will be rarer in the UK than in western Europe. But this brief review suggests that British voters have little to fear from coalition governments and something to gain. The partners in coalitions here are likely to seek to honour individual party programmes, or pre-election agreements; any coalitions are likely to reflect a majority of voters; and the prospect of parties with extreme views gaining power will diminish.

How effective are coalition governments?

National well-being is hard to measure directly. It is almost impossible to trace out exactly what is due to government action and what is due to other, often structural and institutional factors. So in talking about the general effectiveness of coalitions we can only offer relevant but not conclusive evidence. Where this evidence is most convincing, however, is in destroying any idea that there is a *prima facie* case against the effectiveness of coalitions in general. Indeed, if there is a *prima facie* case to be made, it is against the general effectiveness and efficiency of single-party governments. Erring on the side of caution, however, it is probably best to say that there are only limited grounds for claiming greater effectiveness of one side over the other.

The most commonly used measure of national well-being is economic growth, as measured by the annual increase in Gross Domestic Product. Table 2 presents average annual

growth figures for the United Kingdom and the USA and broadly comparable countries in Europe (France, Germany, Italy) which have coalition governments, for the period 1960-90. The growth figures are shown before and after the oil shocks of the mid-1970s. What they reveal is common knowledge. Britain's growth rate lagged behind the coalition countries in the earlier period, as did that of the USA. After the oil shocks the figures became more equal, but there is no sharp divide between countries with different forms of government. Britain and France parallel each other as do the USA and Italy. German growth temporarily slowed down but jumped again at the end of the decade (4 per cent in 1989). Growth in GDP hardly decides the matter of course. Various 'quality of life' measures, recording the adverse affects of growth, show Britain performing better than Japan but hardly better than Germany and France.

The general point is, however, that

Table 2: Rates of Growth of GDP in Comparable Countries with and without Coalition Government, 1962-88*

Average GDP rate of increase for:	1962-1972		1977-1988	
France	4.7		1.6	
Germany	3.6		1.3	
Italy	3.9		2.2	
UK	2.2		1.8	
USA	3.0		2.3	

*Annual Percentage Rates of Increase in Gross Domestic Product)

Source: Ian Budge, 'Relative Decline as a Political Issue', *Contemporary Record*, vol 7, No. 1, (Summer 1993), p. 5.

even under a Thatcherite regime which concentrated the powers of single-party government to an unusual degree and focused on economic growth, Britain hardly stands out as exceptional. Even at best, it lags behind the country, Italy, whose coalitions could most justly be criticised for weakness and indecisiveness.

On the general historical record, too, postwar British governments do not appear as more generally successful than German – or indeed Italian – governments which in two decades brought the country out of occupation and defeat to prosperity and military security. Broadening the comparison, one could not say that Scandinavia, often under minority governments or coalitions, offers less quality of life than Britain; or the Low Countries either. Such general comparisons are about as far as we can take the matter and must be severely qualified. They certainly do not indicate, however, that coalition governments are less effective than single-party governments.

AV-PLUS – THE BASICS OF THE JENKINS SCHEME

We go on in the next section, 'How AV-Plus would have worked in 1997 and 1992' to test the Commission's scheme under the quite different political conditions of 1997 and 1992. This section of the guide explains the basics of the scheme and how the local and top-up seats are distributed in Great Britain, and goes on to describe the methodology which has been employed to test the scheme, and a variant using FPTP for the local elections. Much of the detailed explanation of the methodology is fairly technical in nature. We set it out here because we believe in transparency, but it may be passed over by readers who are not expert in such matters. The section as a whole is based on the evaluation of the Commission's final AV-Plus scheme presented to the Commission by Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts, its academic consultants.

Constituency and top-up seats under the Jenkins scheme

The Commission decided finally to present the government with three alternatives of the same basic scheme, varying only in the ratios of constituency to top-up MPs. The three options use the same basic structure of areas. We test them under the quite different conditions of 1992 and 1997, the

last two elections, and compare the results of the Jenkins Commission's choice, using the alternative vote (AV) for elections of constituency MPs, with the results of using plurality-rule, or first past the post, elections to choose them.

The three top-up area schemes examined are:

- *Scheme A*, with 112 top-up seats in Great Britain (17.5 per cent of the total number of MPs);
- *Scheme B*, with 128 top-up seats (20 per cent of the total)
- *Scheme C*, with 96 top-up seats (15 per cent of the total).

The three schemes use the same set of 78 top-up areas in Great Britain to group together Westminster constituencies for the purposes of allocating one or top-up MPs. (We discuss the special problems raised by Northern Ireland below; see pp. 55-8.) As the final scheme was defined very late on in the Commission's processes, we present data for the FPTP elections in slightly different and older versions of schemes A, B and C. The differences in terms of seats for the different parties are very small. But readers should note that the allocation of top-up seats between England, Scotland and Wales varies slightly more between the final and earlier versions of the three schemes.

The top-up areas, as defined by the Commission, are:

1. Counties in England outside metropolitan areas. Four very large counties – Kent, Essex, Lancashire and Hampshire – are split in half. This step simplifies the size range of top-up areas, and very importantly avoids creating too large a variation between top-up areas in the threshold levels at which parties would win seats, a feature otherwise likely to have a severely distorting effect on party behaviour)

2. Sub-divisions of London and the metropolitan counties, which fit with district or borough boundaries, so far as possible.

3. The existing top-up areas to be used in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections in 1999, which correspond to the Euro-constituency boundaries recommended by the respective Boundary Commissions for the two countries in their thorough 1996 reports.

The resulting areas (with two exceptions) all contain at least five current parliamentary constituencies, and no more than 11 constituencies. Table 3 shows the number of top-up areas in the Commission's schema by the number of existing MPs. The most common total of MPs each areas would have is eight (which is also the median size).

The distribution around the median is fairly symmetric, except for a small bulge of 12 areas with 11 MPs each. There is a single historic county in the scheme (Northumberland) with

Table 3: The distribution of top-up areas by total number of MPs in each area, Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Total MPs in top-up area:	No. of top-up areas	% of top-up areas
Four	1	1.3
Five	6	7.5
Six	10	12.5
Seven	12	15.0
Eight	15	18.8
Nine	13	16.3
Ten	10	12.5
Eleven	12	15.0
Twelve	1	1.3
All areas	80	100.2 %

only four MPs, including one top-up MP; and another county (Staffordshire) with 12 MPs in total, including two top-up MPs. The Commission could have removed these discrepancies, by merging Northumberland with a neighbouring county (such as Durham, creating another 11-seater) and splitting Staffordshire up into two top-up areas (with six seats in each). But it finally decided to tolerate such minor anomalies in order to maintain historical areas.

The basis for allocating top-up seats in all three schemes is that areas with fewer Westminster constituencies have only a single top-up MP, while larger areas are allocated two top-up MPs. The differences between the A, B and C schemes arise simply from the threshold at which a top-up area qualifies for two top-up MPs. The allocation rule is:

- (i) Calculate the number of top-up

Table 4: Top-up MPs and areas with two top-up seats across Great Britain

Scheme A: 112 seats					
	<i>All seats</i>	<i>Top-up areas</i>	<i>Top-up seats</i>	<i>Two-seat top-up areas</i>	<i>Top-up seats as % of all</i>
GB	641	78	112	34	17.5
England	529	65	92	27	17.4
Scotland	72	8	13	5	18.1
Wales	40	5	7	2	17.5

Scheme B: 128 seats					
	<i>All seats</i>	<i>TU areas</i>	<i>TU seats</i>	<i>Two-seat TU areas</i>	<i>TU seats as % of all</i>
GB	641	78	128	50	20.0
England	529	65	106	41	20.0
Scotland	72	8	14	6	19.4
Wales	40	5	8	3	20.0

Scheme C: 96 seats					
	<i>All seats</i>	<i>TU areas</i>	<i>TU seats</i>	<i>Two-seat TU areas</i>	<i>TU seats as % of all</i>
GB	641	78	96	18	15.0
England	529	65	79	14	14.9
Scotland	72	8	11	3	15.3
Wales	40	5	6	1	15.0

MPs needed in each component country of the UK to maintain a constant ratio of top-up to total MPs, (20, 17.5 or 15 per cent according to which scheme is adopted);

(ii) Assign one top-up seat to each top-up area in each country;

(iii) Assign a second top-up seat to the most populous top-up areas in each country, ranked in descending order of their population size (meas-

ured by number of electors), until all available top-up seats in that country have been allocated.

Thus, under scheme A the 27 top-up areas in England with most electors are assigned two top-up seats each, plus the five most populous areas in Scotland and the two most Welsh areas. Table 4 shows how the number of top-up seats would vary across the three countries in Great Britain and across the different

Table 5: The distribution of top-up areas by size of electorate

<i>Electors per top-up area:</i>	<i>No. of top-up areas</i>
Below 300,000 people	1
300000 to 399,000 people	11
400000 to 499,000 people	19
500000 to 599,000 people	21
600000 to 699,000 people	11
700000 to 799,000 people	13
Over 800000 people	2

schemes. The size of the Commission's top-up areas in terms of population size is shown in Table 5. The distribution of top-up areas by the size of the electorate has a peak of 21 areas between 500,000 and 600,000 electors, tapering off fairly symmetrically to either side. Only one top-up area (Northumberland) has fewer than 300,000 electors, while two (Staffordshire and Devon) have rather more than 800,000 electors.

The average (mean) number of electors per top-up area is 546,000 across Britain (for further information, see the LSE/Birkbeck report, *The Performance of the Commission's Schemes for a New Electoral System*, by Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts, LSE Public Policy Group, 1998, p. 10). However, the median figure (at 525,000) is probably a more reliable guide to average sizes overall, since it is not distorted by higher numbers in a few areas. The mean figure in England is slightly larger at 560,000, while the means for Scotland and Wales are considerably lower at 493,000 and 440,000 respectively. (In these two countries the median is less

representative because of the small number of cases.)

Calculating the effects of AV-Plus

The calculations conducted here use data from the 1997 and 1992 election to project forward results for the Commission's chosen voting scheme. However, readers need to be aware of the simulation methods used and some of their key limitations. We wanted to compare the effects of the Commission's AV-Plus scheme with those of an equivalent AMS scheme – that is, the Jenkins scheme using FPTP in local elections rather than AV. (The Jenkins scheme belongs broadly within the AMS family of electoral systems.) This modified version of AMS would be the scheme which the dissenting Commission member, Lord Alexander of Weedon QC, was in effect recommending in his 'note of reservation'.

However, our data from 1992 and 1997 are only completely accurate for a 'classic' AMS scheme (with half the seats local and half top-up MPs) which pairs existing Westminster constituencies. Since the Commission's scheme involves retaining local seats for five out of six seats (or four out of five) – an utterly different proportion – our approach has been as follows:

1. We defined a set of local seats for 'classic' AMS within the Commission's 78 top-up areas, and projected an outcome in terms of both local and top-up seats for each such area. Note that the AMS pairings used here are distinctive because the constituencies have had to be paired so that all pair-

ings fall within the 78 top-areas. The AMS pairings here are quite different from those used in *Making Votes Count 2: Mixed Electoral Systems* (Democratic Audit Paper No. 14, 1998). The pairs of seats there only had to fit within 11 or 18 broad regions used to allocate top-up MPs.

2. We established the difference between each party's local seats in the 100 per cent local scheme (that is, the general election constituencies) and in the 50:50 scheme. From there we computed a marginal increment (or decrease) in local seats which each party in each top-up area would receive, as the proportion of local seats in that area grows from 50 to 100 per cent in single percentage steps. This marginal increment stage is key because in some top-up areas with odd numbers of total seats, our 'classic' AMS solution will in fact involve fewer than half of seats being local seats. For instance, in a seven-member area, we had to form two AMS pairs of seats, plus an AMS triple, giving only three local seats.*

3. A small additional complication is that the percentage of all seats in each top-up area varies considerably in the Commission's schema, depending on

the number of MPs per area and the point where two top-up seats limit is placed. Table 6 (over) shows that both in top-up areas with seven or fewer MPs, and in areas with ten or more MPs, the top-up MPs' share of all MPs is constant across the three schemes. But in top-up areas with eight or nine MPs this share fluctuates sharply across the schemes. In Scheme A, the share of top-up MPs varies from 12.5 to 22 per cent; in Scheme B, from 14-25 per cent; and in Scheme C, from 11-20 per cent.

4. For the actual proportion of local seats in each top-up area under the Commission's scheme we then *interpolated* a local seats projection for that scheme. An essential assumption here is that there is a linear relationship between changes in the proportion of local seats used under various AMS schemes and in the seats won by parties. If this relationship is not in fact completely linear, some distortions will arise in our estimates.

5. In a number of cases the model makes conflicting arithmetical predictions of the number of seats that would be won by two different parties in a single top-up area – for instance, requiring that two parties win the same

* For technical readers, a detailed listing is available from LSE which provides a details of all the current Westminster parliamentary constituencies in each of the top-up areas. This listing also gives a column for an 'AMS pairing', indicating which constituencies have been paired together to compute the 'classic' AMS local seats data. There are also a fair number of cases where three constituencies have had to be joined here to fit within the top-up area boundaries. We have tried to pair socially similar constituencies and to preserve so far as possible a diversity of party representation in the paired local seats. But it is important to bear in mind that these are analytic pairings for research purposes only. The actual local seat boundaries which would be set under the Commission's scheme in action will not resemble these pairings, but be much closer to the 100 per cent local scheme seats in use at present.

local seat. These cases have to be resolved judgementally, making reference to the geographic pattern and extent of party support in that top-up area in the base election year, and the fit between these variables and the likely AMS constituencies under the Commission's scheme in that top-up area.

6. Having estimated local seat outcomes under the Commission's scheme, we then allocated the one or two top-up seats in each area using the d'Hondt allocation rule (already legislated for use in the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and European Parliament elections). Again this method is slightly different from our previous work (which allocated top-up seats using a generic 'minimising DV' allocation rule). The distinctive impact of the d'Hondt rule is relatively restricted, however, because there are so few top-up seats in each area, and these seats normally

go to very conspicuously under-represented parties. Note that the impact of the top-up seat allocations still tends to correct for any substantial biases in estimating local seats distributions – because in the end AMS seats must get as close to matching vote shares as the number of available top-up MPs allows.

Our procedures for simulating AV-Plus outcomes are essentially the same as for a Jenkins version of AMS, with one significant difference. We used data from our 1992 and 1997 surveys on how people filled in AV ballot papers across the regions of Great Britain (13 in 1992 and 18 in 1997) to run AV contests in the existing Westminster constituencies, and in our AMS-paired constituencies. These 100 per cent and 50 per cent local seats outcomes under AV were then substituted in the simulation, instead of the plurality-rule results used with AMS.

Table 6: Top-up MPs as a percentage of all MPs in a top-up area across different sizes of top-up area

<i>Total number of MPs in a top-up area</i>	<i>Number of top-up seats</i>	<i>Top-up MPs as a % of all MPs in the area</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Five	One	20%	All schemes
Six	One	17%	All schemes
Seven	One	14%	All schemes
Seven	Two	28%	A few areas, varies by scheme
Eight	One	12.5%	Some areas, varies by scheme
Eight	Two	25%	Some areas, varies by scheme
Nine	One	22%	A few areas in Scheme C
Nine	Two	22%	Most areas, all schemes
Ten	Two	20%	All schemes
Eleven	Two	18%	All schemes

In estimating all these outcomes we have worked directly from the constituency votes in the two general elections. We have therefore arrived at a whole top-up area vote under both AV-Plus and an AMS version of Jenkins by aggregating up votes from the component constituencies, since this data is much more fine-grain than any we could generate from our survey responses. Nonetheless this is an important limitation. In some of our work, notably a publication *Devolution Votes* (LSE Public Policy Group, 1997) dealing with the likely results under AMS of elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, we compared simulation outcomes using actual votes only with outcomes obtained using more voting patterns projected from our survey data. Some significant differences arise because of vote-splitting effects (See the section, 'Split-ticket tactical voting' below). Under the Commission's system, voters will have two separate ballot papers, and they may choose to vote differently at the constituency level and for top-up MPs. If highly organised or differential 'tactical voting' should emerge on a significant scale, there will be some variations from the results reported in the main tables here. The potential impact is greater with AV-Plus than with an AMS variant.

We have also used a simpler way of modelling the results for the 1992 general election than we did in previously published work. We have used the BBC/ITN data showing the 1992 results re-calculated on the basis of

the 1997 constituencies, instead of going back to reconstruct the whole constituency map as we did in *Making Votes Count* and *Making Votes Count 2: Mixed Electoral Systems*. The reason for this change is fundamentally logistical: Dunleavy and Margetts could not calculate the results for 1992 within the Commission's 78 areas in any other way within the deadlines they were working to. We have reservations about the accuracy of the re-calculated BBC/ITN data, but since the Commission's schemes use 78 top-up areas instead of 18 regions, there would also have been large and unavoidable inaccuracies in remodelling the 1992 constituency pattern to fit these schemes (which of course are drawn up for the 1997 pattern of constituencies). On balance, we do not believe that using the BBC/ITN data produces less accurate figures. We have carefully cross-checked the results here and in our published work and found no substantial divergences. But readers should note that the tables of 1992 results add up to 641 constituencies, and not the 634 constituencies actually existing at that time.

Finally, it is important to stress that the simulations in this guide provide only a snapshot picture of how the Commission's schemes would have operated under 1997 and 1992 conditions. They do not (and cannot) take into account the dynamic effects of the introduction of a new system. However, on a number of issues below, we do cite evidence relevant to thinking

through such dynamic effects where it is possible to measure their potential in quantitative terms. But it is important to bear in mind is that dynamic effects will certainly introduce divergences from the estimates published here. These estimates are presented in precise quantitative terms, but we do not mean to imply that an electoral system can be fine-tuned by design decisions. Actual results under a new electoral system will reflect the infinite capacity of both voters and political parties to re-assess and change their behaviour in response to new conditions.

The supplementary vote

There is another electoral system, the supplementary vote (SV), which is a close cousin of the Commission's choice for local elections, the alternative vote. Like AV, SV is used for elections in single-member constituencies, but instead of numbering all or some of the candidates in order of preference, voters simply make a first-preference and second-preference choice. Again, a candidate who gains more than half the first-preference votes cast is elected. But if no-one passes this threshold, then only the two top candidates remain in the contest and the second preferences of the eliminated candidates are distributed between the top pair. The surviving candidate with most votes is then elected, and of course second preference votes for eliminated candidates do not count.

Our research has demonstrated that in the 1997 general election, SV

produced identical seats outcomes to AV, both within the current 641 Westminster constituencies, and in our paired constituencies. In 1992, there was a single constituency (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber) where the Supplementary Vote would have stymied a third-placed candidate who would have won under AV. There were two other cases in 1992 where a similar effect came close to happening but in the end just did not, and one similar 'near miss' in 1997. But the only clear difference between SV and AV outcomes was the single seat change in 1992. Essentially therefore, SV-Plus would perform just as AV-Plus would. Since SV has however different qualities from AV, and is regarded by some experts as being the superior system, we are not eliminating it from this survey of the Jenkins recommendations. In all subsequent tables in the guide, results quoted for AV-Plus will apply also for SV-Plus.

HOW AV-PLUS WOULD HAVE WORKED IN 1997 AND 1992

We now examine how the three versions of Jenkin's AV-Plus – schemes A, B and C – would have performed under 1997 conditions. This general election is a difficult one for any electoral system to cope with for two reasons. First, 4.4 per cent of the electorate voted for small parties with diminutive vote shares, which are unlikely to secure representation under any electoral system. This figure is twice as high as the British norm of around 2 per cent for smaller parties. Second, the leading party (Labour) was 14 percentage points ahead of the second party (the Conservatives), gaining in effect 1.5 times their principal rival's vote and so greatly strengthening the possibility of a 'leader's bias' effect.

Under AV-Plus, local members are elected under the alternative vote to ensure that all constituency MPs win majority support in their locality. The simpler version of AV, the supplementary vote (SV; see p. 32), achieves the same aim. In British politics, the extent to which either of these majoritarian systems make a difference compared with plurality-rule is basically governed by the distribution of the second preferences of Liberal Democrat voters (and to a lesser degree, of voters for minor parties too).

In 1997, Liberal Democrats gave the largest share of their second preferences to Labour, so that in constituencies where the Liberal Democrats ran third, Labour was advantaged and the Tories lost out – an effect apparent both in actual Westminster constituency contests re-run under SV or AV and in our paired AMS constituencies. In areas where the Liberal Democrats ran second, they could generally rely on attracting the bulk of third-placed candidates' second preferences, whether Conservatives or Labour.

Table 7 shows the overall outcomes of the Commission's 'middle scheme' – scheme A with 112 top-up MPs (or 17.5 per cent of all MPs). The table shows both the local and top-up seats the parties would have won under AV-Plus in 1997, and the parties' total number of seats, for England and English regions, Scotland and Wales. The table also shows the deviation from proportionality on a regional and national basis. Note that the results are grouped by countries and English regions, not by top-up areas (for which, see Table 9). Thus, in 1997, Labour would have gained virtually all their seats under AV-Plus at the local level, the 357 local seats in Great Britain being enough in fact to secure

Table 7: Seats won under AV-Plus with 112 (17.5%) top-up in re-run 1997 election (Great Britain)

	Local seats					Top-up seats					All seats					Total	DV
	Con	Lab	LD	Nat	Other	Con	Lab	LD	Nat	Other	Con	Lab	LD	Nat	Other		
South West	3	14	25	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	12	14	25	0	0	51	18.8
South East	50	32	14	0	0	6	7	8	0	0	56	39	22	0	0	117	7.9
West Midlands	7	39	3	0	0	9	0	1	0	0	16	39	4	0	0	59	18.3
East Anglia	6	10	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	8	11	3	0	0	22	11.7
East Midlands	10	25	1	0	0	4	1	3	0	0	14	26	4	0	0	44	11.3
Yorks & Humb'side	4	39	3	0	0	7	1	2	0	0	11	40	5	0	0	56	19.5
North	1	28	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	7	28	1	0	0	36	16.9
North West	5	47	3	0	1	10	0	4	0	0	15	47	7	0	1	70	12.9
London	7	48	5	0	0	11	0	3	0	0	18	48	8	0	0	74	15.4
ENGLAND	93	282	57	0	1	64	10	22	0	0	157	292	79	0	1	529	11.6
SCOTLAND	0	47	9	6	0	5	0	0	5	0	5	47	9	11	0	72	19.7
WALES	0	28	3	3	0	5	0	1	0	0	5	28	4	3	0	40	15.3
GREAT BRITAIN	93	357	69	9	1	74	10	23	5	0	167	367	92	14	1	641	12.9
Compare:																	
GREATBRITAIN 1992	277	223	24	5	0	39	17	50	6	0	316	240	74	11	0	641	8.7

an overall majority in the House of Commons (where the winning post is 330 seats). The Conservatives would still be under-represented, gaining almost the same total of seats (167) as they did in the actual general election (165), while the Liberal Democrats would double their seat count from 46 actual seats in 1997 to 92 MPs under AV-Plus.

The deviation (DV) scores in Table 7 measure how many MPs would hold seats not justified in terms of their party's share of the vote in their region or the country as a whole. A fully-proportional system in 1997 would have given a result within the 4 to 8 per cent range, and probably towards the top end of that range. In the actual 1997 election under FPTP, the national DV score was much higher, at 21 per cent. As usual, the DV levels are higher at a regional level than across Britain as a whole, but they reduce to a lower national figure principally because a bias in the Conservatives' favour in southern England partly offsets a bias towards Labour in its heartlands. Under the Commission's scheme, the overall national DV score would have been 12.9 per cent – a score which is three-fifths less disproportional than the actual FPTP result in 1997, but still above the 4-8 per cent levels most other European countries achieve.

Tables 8 and 9 (pp. 36-37) show what would have happened in 1997 conditions under the Commission's two other schemes – scheme B, with one in five Commons seats going to top-up MPs and scheme C with 96

top-up seats (15 per cent). Scheme B is significantly more proportional, with deviation from proportionality at just over 11 per cent – almost halving the DV score in the actual general election. However, the scheme would still be well above the fully-proportional 4 to 8 per cent range for DV scores. The main change would be to reduce the number of Labour local seats, with the extra top-up MPs going primarily to the Conservatives who would claim ten more MPs overall than in the actual general election. Labour's total would fall a bit to 359 seats for Great Britain – still enough for an overall victory – and the Liberal Democrat total would scarcely change. With just 96 top-up MPs (15 per cent), disproportionality would rise appreciably to nearly 15 per cent, offering the smallest reduction on the actual general election DV score. Labour would be the clear beneficiary here, winning a major increase in local seats (370 in all) at the expense of all the other parties, though the Liberal Democrats would be only marginally affected.

But what would happen at local level? Table 10 (pp 38-40) shows the results for scheme A (the 17.5 per cent top-up) at the level of the Commission's 78 top-up areas in mainland Britain. For each area, we show the vote shares of the major parties, their projected holdings of local and top-up seats, and their total seat shares. We use the d'Hondt counting method to determine the allocation of top-up seats. (Interested readers can work out the number of top-up seats a party has

Table 8: Seats won under AV-Plus with 128 (20%) top-up in re-run 1997 election (Great Britain)

	<i>Local seats</i>					<i>Top-up seats</i>					<i>All seats</i>					<i>DV</i>	
	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>
South West	3	14	24	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	13	14	24	0	0	51	16.8
South East	48	31	13	0	0	8	8	9	0	0	56	39	22	0	0	117	7.9
West Midlands	6	39	3	0	0	10	0	1	0	0	16	39	4	0	0	59	18.3
East Anglia	6	9	1	0	0	3	1	2	0	0	9	10	3	0	0	22	9.4
East Midlands	10	25	1	0	0	4	1	3	0	0	14	26	4	0	0	44	11.3
Yorks & Hum	4	36	3	0	0	10	1	2	0	0	14	37	5	0	0	56	14.1
North	1	27	1	0	0	6	0	1	0	0	7	27	2	0	0	36	14.1
North West	5	46	3	0	1	11	0	4	0	0	16	46	7	0	1	70	11.5
London	7	48	5	0	0	11	0	3	0	0	18	48	8	0	0	74	15.4
ENGLAND	90	275	54	0	1	73	11	25	0	0	163	286	79	0	1	529	10.4
SCOTLAND	0	46	8	6	0	6	0	0	6	0	6	46	8	12	0	72	18.3
WALES	0	27	3	3	0	6	0	1	0	0	6	27	4	3	0	40	12.8
GREAT BRITAIN	90	348	65	9	1	85	11	26	6	0	175	359	91	15	1	641	11.6
Compare:																	
1992 GB TOTAL	268	216	24	5	0	41	24	57	6	0	309	240	81	11	0	641	7.6

Table 9: Seats won under AV-Plus with 96 (15%) top-up in re-run 1997 election (Great Britain)

	<i>Local seats</i>					<i>Top-up seats</i>					<i>All seats</i>					<i>DV</i>	
	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>
South West	3	14	25	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	12	14	25	0	0	51	18.8
South East	50	34	16	0	0	5	6	6	0	0	55	40	22	0	0	117	7.9
West Midlands	7	39	3	0	0	9	0	1	0	0	16	39	4	0	0	59	18.3
East Anglia	7	10	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	8	11	3	0	0	22	11.7
East Midlands	10	25	1	0	0	4	1	3	0	0	14	26	4	0	0	44	11.3
Yorks & Hum	4	41	3	0	0	7	0	1	0	0	11	41	4	0	0	56	21.3
North	1	28	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	7	28	1	0	0	36	16.9
North West	5	51	3	0	1	7	0	3	0	0	12	51	6	0	1	70	18.6
London	7	51	5	0	0	8	0	3	0	0	15	51	8	0	0	74	19.4
ENGLAND	94	293	59	0	1	56	8	18	0	0	150	301	77	0	1	529	13.3
SCOTLAND	0	48	9	6	0	5	0	0	4	0	5	48	9	10	0	72	21.1
WALES	0	29	3	3	0	5	0	0	0	0	5	29	3	3	0	40	17.8
GREAT BRITAIN	94	370	71	9	1	66	8	18	4	0	160	378	89	13	1	641	14.6
Compare:																	
1992 GB TOTAL	284	230	26	5	0	31	14	45	6	0	315	244	71	11	0	641	9.2

Table 10: Seats won under AV-Plus in re-run 1997 election with 17.5% top-up, by top-up

Top-up areas	Vote shares						Local seats				
	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	PC	Other	Con	Lab	LD	Nat	Other
Dorset	41.8	18.8	34.1	0.0	0.0	5.3	0	1	6	0	0
Wiltshire	40.2	28.0	26.2	0.0	0.0	5.6	0	2	3	0	0
Gloucestershire	39.4	33.9	22.5	0.0	0.0	4.2	1	3	1	0	0
Bristol and Bath	32.7	36.5	26.3	0.0	0.0	4.5	1	4	3	0	0
Somerset	36.5	17.4	40.6	0.0	0.0	5.4	0	0	4	0	0
Devon	36.8	25.9	31.3	0.0	0.0	6.1	1	3	5	0	0
Cornwall	30.4	17.1	44.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	0	1	3	0	0
Essex South West	39.8	40.1	15.3	0.0	0.0	4.8	4	4	0	0	0
Essex North East	40.9	31.6	22.1	0.0	0.0	5.4	3	1	2	0	0
Oxfordshire	38.0	31.7	24.7	0.0	0.0	5.6	3	1	1	0	0
Berkshire	42.2	28.5	24.6	0.0	0.0	4.7	3	2	1	0	0
Buckinghamshire	43.7	30.6	21.2	0.0	0.0	4.5	4	2	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	40.6	39.7	16.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	4	5	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	38.6	44.0	12.8	0.0	0.0	4.6	2	3	0	0	0
Surrey	46.2	22.3	24.5	0.0	0.0	7.0	7	0	2	0	0
Kent East	39.2	37.7	17.1	0.0	0.0	6.1	2	2	1	0	0
Kent West	41.2	36.8	17.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	4	5	0	0	0
East Sussex	39.4	29.2	24.0	0.0	0.0	7.4	2	3	2	0	0
West Sussex	44.7	24.3	25.6	0.0	0.0	5.5	5	1	1	0	0
Hampshire Solent	35.7	33.5	24.9	0.0	0.0	5.9	2	2	3	0	0
Hampshire North	46.3	21.2	28.8	0.0	0.0	5.2	5	1	1	0	0
Warwickshire	38.7	43.8	13.9	0.0	0.0	3.6	1	3	0	0	0
Hereford & Worcs	41.0	32.6	21.9	0.0	0.0	4.5	2	3	2	0	0
Shropshire	37.2	39.7	20.5	0.0	0.0	2.7	0	3	1	0	0
Staffordshire	33.7	51.3	10.7	0.0	0.0	4.2	1	9	0	0	0
Dudley & Sandwell	26.5	55.9	9.8	0.0	0.0	7.9	0	6	0	0	0
Birmingham	28.4	54.6	12.8	0.0	0.0	4.3	1	8	0	0	0
Coventry & Solihull	32.9	47.0	13.6	0.0	0.0	6.6	1	3	0	0	0
Wolverhampton/ Walsall	33.2	54.4	8.3	0.0	0.0	4.2	1	4	0	0	0
Suffolk	37.6	40.2	17.6	0.0	0.0	4.6	2	4	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	42.0	34.5	17.9	0.0	0.0	5.6	3	2	1	0	0
Norfolk	36.7	39.9	18.2	0.0	0.0	5.1	1	4	1	0	0
Lincolnshire	42.4	36.9	17.5	0.0	0.0	3.1	4	2	0	0	0
Northants	40.4	45.0	11.1	0.0	0.0	3.4	1	4	0	0	0
Leicestershire	36.8	43.8	15.1	0.0	0.0	4.3	3	4	1	0	0
Notts	30.5	54.3	10.9	0.0	0.0	4.3	1	8	0	0	0
Derbyshire	29.5	53.6	13.8	0.0	0.0	3.1	1	7	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	40.0	32.8	23.0	0.0	0.0	4.2	3	2	1	0	0
Humberside	30.4	50.4	15.8	0.0	0.0	3.3	1	6	1	0	0
W Yorkshire: Leeds	28.0	55.3	12.9	0.0	0.0	3.8	0	7	0	0	0
W Yorkshire: Bradford	33.0	49.6	13.2	0.0	0.0	4.3	0	6	0	0	0

Continued overleaf

areas (GB)

<i>All seats after top-ups</i>					
<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>DV</i>
1	1	6	0	0	40.9
1	2	3	0	0	29.1
2	3	1	0	0	16.1
3	4	3	0	0	7.2
1	0	4	0	0	39.4
3	3	5	0	0	15.6
1	1	3	0	0	18.9
4	5	1	0	0	10.1
3	2	2	0	0	8.4
3	2	1	0	0	13.6
4	2	2	0	0	8.2
4	2	1	0	0	13.5
5	5	1	0	0	10.6
3	3	0	0	0	17.5
7	2	2	0	0	17.4
3	2	1	0	0	10.8
4	5	2	0	0	9.8
3	3	2	0	0	9.3
5	1	2	0	0	17.8
3	3	3	0	0	8.4
5	2	2	0	0	11.0
2	3	0	0	0	17.5
3	3	2	0	0	8.0
1	3	1	0	0	20.3
3	9	0	0	0	23.7
1	6	0	0	0	29.8
2	8	1	0	0	18.1
2	3	0	0	0	20.2
2	4	0	0	0	12.5
2	4	1	0	0	16.9
3	3	1	0	0	9.2
3	4	1	0	0	10.8
4	2	1	0	0	14.7
2	4	0	0	0	21.6
4	5	1	0	0	9.4
2	8	1	0	0	18.4
2	7	1	0	0	16.4
3	3	2	0	0	6.7
3	6	1	0	0	9.6
1	7	0	0	0	32.2
1	6	0	0	0	36.1

won in any area by simply subtracting the local seats from the total seats figures). Notice that again there are some high and very high DV scores in many top-up areas. Even though these distortions are often countervailing and even out at national level, they are real enough at the level at which voters actually feel the experience of voting. Despite the effect of AV, which institutionalises 'tactical voting' of the kind which occurred in 1997, with Labour and Liberal Democrats voters making the other party their second preference, and thus damaging the Conservatives in many seats, a notable feature of the results is that both the Conservatives and Labour have an MP in all the top-up areas, except for four. The Conservatives are utterly excluded from three top-up areas in central Scotland and Labour in the Somerset top-up area. The Liberal Democrats have no MP in 25 top-up areas, mostly in Labour heartlands territory. They, too, gain no seats in the three central Scotland top-up areas from which the Tories are excluded; and indeed eight of Glasgow's ten seats go to Labour (the SNP claims the other two). The SNP would gain an MP in four out of eight top-up areas in Scotland, while Plaid Cymru would win seats in two out of five top-up areas in Wales. Thus, the undesirable phenomenon of 'electoral deserts', noted by the Commission (see p. 13), is greatly diminished.

For the sake of comparison, Tables 7, 8 and 9 all include a row below the 1997 results showing how the parties

Table 10 continued

Top-up areas	Vote shares						Local seats				
	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	PC	Other	Con	Lab	LD	Nat	Other
W Yorkshire: South	25.9	56.9	12.7	0.0	0.0	4.5	0	7	0	0	0
South Yorks (Sheffield & Rotherham)	16.5	59.7	20.3	0.0	0.0	3.5	0	6	1	0	0
South Yorks (Barnsley & Doncaster)	16.9	66.3	11.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	0	5	0	0	0
Cleveland	25.2	62.4	9.8	0.0	0.0	2.6	0	5	0	0	0
Tyne & Wear South	14.6	69.4	11.8	0.0	0.0	4.3	0	7	0	0	0
Tyne & Wear North (inc Newcastle)	21.2	63.8	11.9	0.0	0.0	3.2	0	4	0	0	0
Durham	17.6	68.5	9.7	0.0	0.0	4.2	0	6	0	0	0
Cumbria	33.5	45.8	16.5	0.0	0.0	4.1	1	4	0	0	0
Northumberland	22.7	48.7	25.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	0	2	1	0	0
Liverpool & Wirral	19.1	63.5	12.8	0.0	0.0	4.7	0	7	0	0	0
Merseyside North	20.6	60.0	16.5	0.0	0.0	3.0	0	5	1	0	0
Manchester North	25.8	54.2	16.7	0.0	0.0	3.3	0	6	1	0	0
Manchester West	23.6	62.3	10.9	0.0	0.0	3.3	0	7	0	0	0
Manchester East	23.0	53.1	20.2	0.0	0.0	3.7	1	6	1	0	0
Cheshire	33.4	46.5	12.3	0.0	0.0	7.8	2	6	0	0	1
Lancashire South	29.6	55.2	10.8	0.0	0.0	4.3	0	6	0	0	0
Lancashire North	39.3	42.5	14.8	0.0	0.0	3.4	2	4	0	0	0
South East London	36.6	41.3	16.7	0.0	0.0	5.4	3	6	0	0	0
South West London	34.6	33.7	28.2	0.0	0.0	3.5	0	3	4	0	0
South Central London	23.6	57.9	14.3	0.0	0.0	4.2	0	8	1	0	0
North West London	32.8	53.1	10.1	0.0	0.0	3.6	1	8	0	0	0
North London	32.9	52.3	11.4	0.0	0.0	3.4	1	8	0	0	0
North East London	28.2	56.9	8.3	0.0	0.0	6.6	0	8	0	0	0
North Central London	27.4	53.5	12.7	0.0	0.0	6.5	2	7	0	0	0
Scotland: South	22.6	43.4	13.4	19.1	0.0	1.6	0	5	2	1	0
Scot Highlands	16.2	27.0	27.7	26.7	0.0	2.4	0	2	3	1	0
Scot N E	22.4	30.9	18.9	26.1	0.0	1.7	0	4	2	2	0
Scot Mid & Fife	21.1	40.0	12.6	25.3	0.0	1.0	0	5	1	2	0
Scot Central	10.4	59.4	5.2	23.4	0.0	1.6	0	8	0	0	0
Scot West	18.4	52.0	9.4	20.2	0.0	1.3	0	8	0	0	0
Lothians	19.2	45.9	14.9	18.4	0.0	1.5	0	6	1	0	0
Glasgow	8.5	60.2	7.3	19.4	0.0	4.6	0	9	0	0	0
Wales North	24.3	46.7	11.8	0.0	14.2	3.1	0	6	1	1	0
Wales Mid	20.7	37.8	18.4	0.0	20.1	3.0	0	3	2	2	0
Wales South West	15.0	65.6	10.7	0.0	5.7	3.0	0	6	0	0	0
South Wales Central	20.3	58.1	11.8	0.0	5.6	4.2	0	6	0	0	0
South Wales East	16.7	66.1	9.4	0.0	4.2	3.6	0	7	0	0	0
Great Britain	31.5	44.4	17.2	2.0	0.5	4.4	93	357	69	9	1

<i>All seats after top-ups</i>					
<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>DV</i>
1	7	0	0	0	30.6
1	6	2	0	0	8.9
1	5	0	0	0	17.1
1	5	0	0	0	20.9
1	7	0	0	0	18.1
1	4	0	0	0	16.2
1	6	0	0	0	17.2
2	4	0	0	0	20.8
1	2	1	0	0	3.7
1	7	1	0	0	14.3
1	5	1	0	0	11.5
2	6	1	0	0	12.5
2	7	0	0	0	15.5
2	6	2	0	0	6.9
3	6	1	0	1	9.3
2	6	0	0	0	19.8
2	4	1	0	0	14.6
4	6	1	0	0	13.2
2	3	4	0	0	16.3
2	8	1	0	0	14.8
3	8	0	0	0	19.4
2	8	1	0	0	20.5
2	8	0	0	0	23.1
3	7	1	0	0	10.2
1	5	2	1	0	21.0
1	2	3	1	0	16.7
1	4	2	2	0	16.9
1	5	1	2	0	15.6
0	8	0	2	0	20.6
0	8	0	1	0	37.6
1	6	1	1	0	20.7
0	9	0	1	0	29.8
1	6	1	1	0	24.0
1	3	2	2	0	21.6
1	6	0	0	0	17.2
1	6	1	0	0	14.8
1	7	0	0	0	19.3
167	367	92	14	1	12.9

would have performed under the same version of AV-Plus in the 1992 general election. The 1992 election was a more balanced one, with the Conservatives on nearly 43 per cent support, Labour on 35 and the Liberal Democrats just over 18 per cent. The distribution of Liberal Democrats' second preferences was more even, with most support going to the Conservatives nationally and Labour gaining more Lib-Dem second preferences than the Tories in only a few regions. Both Conservative and Labour voters gave the Liberal Democrats majority backing at the second preference stage. In none of the three AV-Plus scenarios would the Conservatives have won the overall majority which FPTP gave them in the actual election in 1992. With a 17.5 per cent top-up in 1992, both the Conservatives and Labour would have won most of their seats locally, but would both have scored well at the top-up stage as well. The Liberal Democrats would have won two thirds of their 74 seats at the top-up stage, but their overall total in seats would have been lower under AV-Plus in 1992 than in 1997, even though their vote was slightly higher in 1992. The DV score for Scheme A in 1992 – 8.7 per cent – would be only slightly outside the full proportional-vote range (see Table 7).

A 20 per cent top-up scheme in 1992 would have fallen within the fully-proportional range with a DV score of 7.6 per cent (see Table 8). The Liberal Democrats would have increased their share of seats to 81, 57 of them won at the top-up stage, and

their gains would have been largely at the expense of the Conservatives. Reducing the proportion of top-up seats to 15 per cent would primarily have benefited Labour in 1992 (see Table 9). Labour's seat total would actually rise by four compared with the other two schemes, with most of their gains coming from the Liberal Democrats. The DV score would rise above 9 per cent, a result that is outside the full proportionality range of 4 to 8 per cent even in a relatively tractable election.

Although the AV-Plus system has advantages in terms of expanding voter choice and in giving MPs the legitimacy of majority support in their constituencies, it can under some circumstances carry a heavy penalty in terms of greater disproportionality. In elections when one of the major parties is particularly disliked, AV elections facilitate joint action against it by voters supporting all the other parties. In 1997 the Conservatives would have lost even more heavily under AV than FPTP because around 61 per cent of voters wanted them out of power, whereas in 1992 no similar conditions applied. Thus AV-Plus (or SV-Plus) automates tactical voting in the local constituency contests. Considering previous elections, we would expect that in 1983, for instance, a very similar effect would have severely penalised Labour under AV-Plus. Defenders of AV-Plus might well argue, however, that these strong effects arose under plurality rule because there were not such strong incentives for parties to maximise

their appeal to voters. Protected in their safe seat areas and able to secure majorities on low shares of the vote, parties under plurality rule had few incentives not to try and bounce 'extreme' or unpopular policies into effect, relying on their core supporters alone. Party behaviour can be expected to change under AV-Plus, and hence the higher distortions that arise under AV-Plus rather than an AMS equivalent using FPTP for the local elections (see next section below), would in practice be lower than in our re-modelled 1997 results.

VOTES AND SEATS UNDER AMS IN 1997 AND 1992

An AMS version of the Jenkins schema could have two advantages over AV-Plus. It would be more proportional (as we show below) than AV-Plus in 1997 conditions and similar elections. And it would allow UK elections to be standardised more on a 'British AMS' model, since other new electoral systems on the mainland (for Scotland's Parliament, the Welsh National Assembly and the Greater London Assembly) share key features. All of them use a double-vote AMS ballot, with FPTP elections for local members; all have a majority of members elected in local constituencies and fairly small top-up areas; all use the d'Hondt allocation rule to distribute seats between parties; and all in effect have relatively high thresholds for third parties seeking to win seats. An AMS version of the Commission scheme, as advocated by Lord Alexander, the dissenting member, would arguably fit quite closely within this wider model, whereas an AV-Plus scheme introduces a discordant element.

Against these points, of course, the ability of voters to indicate preferences at the local constituency stage is restricted to one vote (creating tactical voting incentives to misrepresent their preferences for some voters), and MPs in local constituencies could still be

elected with less than majority support – as 47 per cent of MPs were in the 1997 general election.

In 1997, an AMS version of the Commission's scheme A (with 113 top-up seats, because it is a slightly earlier variant of the scheme that is being tested) would have given the Conservatives almost 30 more seats than the similar AV-Plus scheme – 194 as against 167 (see Tables 11 and 7). Two thirds of these seats would have come from the Liberal Democrats and the other third from Labour. At 10.8 per cent, the DV score would have been two percentage points lower than AV-Plus, although still outside the fully proportional range. As for 1992, the share of seats among the major parties differs only slightly between the AMS version and its AV-Plus equivalent (Tables 11 and 7), and the DV score improves only by less than half of one percentage point. At top-up level under the AMS version of scheme A (though with a slightly different distribution of seats between top-up areas), disproportionality ranges very widely from an almost perfectly proportional result in Shropshire (3 per cent) to a still highly disproportional outcome in Dorset (45 per cent). While these biases partly offset each other, they may still be alienating at the point of voting and receiving the local result.

Table 11: The share of seats under AMS with 113 (17.6%) top-up seats in the re-run 1997 election, Great Britain

	<i>Local seats</i>					<i>Top-up seats</i>					<i>All seats</i>					<i>DV</i>	
	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>
South West	19	11	12	0	0	4	1	4	0	0	23	12	16	0	0	51	8.5
South East	61	29	7	0	0	2	6	12	0	0	63	35	19	0	0	117	12.5
West Midlands	12	37	0	0	0	6	0	4	0	0	18	37	4	0	0	59	14.9
East Anglia	12	7	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	12	7	3	0	0	22	15.9
East Midlands	12	24	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	15	26	3	0	0	44	11.3
Yorks & Hum	6	40	1	0	0	6	0	3	0	0	12	40	4	0	0	56	19.5
North	2	27	1	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	7	27	2	0	0	36	14.1
North West	6	48	2	0	1	7	0	6	0	0	13	48	8	0	1	70	14.4
London	8	47	5	0	0	10	0	4	0	0	18	47	9	0	0	74	14.0
ENGLAND	138	270	28	0	1	43	9	40	0	0	181	279	68	0	1	529	9.6
SCOTLAND	0	45	8	4	0	7	0	0	8	0	7	45	8	12	0	72	17.0
WALES	0	30	1	3	0	6	0	0	0	0	6	30	1	3	0	40	20.3
GREAT BRITAIN	138	345	37	7	1	56	9	40	8	0	194	354	77	15	1	641	10.8
Compare:																	
GB TOTAL 1992	287	221	16	5	0	30	15	59	8	0	317	236	75	13	0	641	8.3

Table 12: The share of seats under AMS with 127 (19.8%) top-up seats in the re-run 1997 election, Great Britain

	<i>Local seats</i>					<i>Top-up seats</i>					<i>All seats</i>					<i>DV</i>	
	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>		
South West	18	11	12	0	0	4	2	4	0	0	22	13	16	0	0	51	6.5
South East	60	27	7	0	0	4	6	13	0	0	64	33	20	0	0	117	13.4
West Midlands	12	36	0	0	0	6	0	5	0	0	18	36	5	0	0	59	13.2
East Anglia	12	6	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	12	7	3	0	0	22	15.9
East Midlands	12	24	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	15	26	3	0	0	44	11.3
Yorks & Hum	6	37	1	0	0	8	0	4	0	0	14	37	5	0	0	56	14.1
North	2	26	1	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	7	26	3	0	0	36	11.3
North West	6	47	2	0	1	8	0	6	0	0	14	47	8	0	1	70	12.9
London	8	47	5	0	0	10	0	4	0	0	18	47	9	0	0	74	14.0
ENGLAND	136	261	28	0	1	48	11	44	0	0	184	272	72	0	1	529	8.9
SCOTLAND	0	45	8	4	0	7	0	0	8	0	7	45	8	12	0	72	17.0
WALES	0	27	1	3	0	7	1	1	0	0	7	28	2	3	0	40	15.3
GREAT BRITAIN	136	333	37	7	1	62	12	45	8	0	198	345	82	15	1	641	9.4
Compare:																	
1992 GB TOTAL	276	218	16	5	0	34	21	63	8	0	310	239	79	13	0	641	7.6

Table 13: The share of seats under AMS with 100 (15.6%) top-up seats in the re-run 1997 election, Great Britain
 Seats outcomes in the 1997 election re-run under AMS, with 100 (15.6%) top-up seats (Scheme C)

	<i>Local seats</i>					<i>Top-up seats</i>					<i>All seats</i>					<i>DV</i>	
	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>
South West	19	11	12	0	0	4	1	4	0	0	23	12	16	0	0	51	8.5
South East	62	30	7	0	0	2	5	11	0	0	64	35	18	0	0	117	13.4
West Midlands	12	37	0	0	0	6	0	4	0	0	18	37	4	0	0	59	14.9
East Anglia	12	7	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	12	7	3	0	0	22	15.9
East Midlands	12	24	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	15	26	3	0	0	44	11.3
Yorks & Hum	6	41	1	0	0	6	0	2	0	0	12	41	3	0	0	56	21.3
North	2	27	1	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	7	27	2	0	0	36	14.1
North West	6	51	2	0	1	7	0	3	0	0	13	51	5	0	1	70	18.6
London	8	48	5	0	0	9	0	4	0	0	17	48	9	0	0	74	15.4
ENGLAND	139	276	28	0	1	42	8	35	0	0	181	284	63	0	1	529	10.6
SCOTLAND	0	49	7	6	0	5	0	0	5	0	5	49	7	11	0	72	22.5
WALES	0	30	1	4	0	5	0	0	0	0	5	30	1	4	0	40	20.3
GREAT BRITAIN	139	355	36	10	1	52	8	35	5	0	191	363	71	15	1	641	12.2
Compare:																	
1992 GB TOTAL	291	227	17	6	0	25	15	54	6	0	316	242	71	12	0	641	9.0

However, the electoral desert effect would again be greatly diminished, with Conservative and Labour MPs in virtually all top-up areas (though the Liberal Democrats would not win a seat in 25 out of 78 areas). (See the LSE/Birkbeck report on the Commission's schemes, Dunleavy and Margetts 1998, pp. 34-7 for the full results.)

Moving on to scheme B for 127 top-up MPs (19.8 per cent of the total), the slightly increased number of top-up MPs would reduce the DV score under 1997 conditions to just 9.4 per cent, or 2.2 percentage points fewer than for the AV-Plus version of scheme B (see Tables 12 and 8), and appreciably closer to full proportionality. In 1997, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives would have gained equally from the additional top-up MPs, lowering the size of Labour's overall majority from 47 to 29 seats. By contrast, in 1992, the DV score for the 20 per cent AMS scheme would be the same as that for AV-Plus, lying just inside the fully proportional range. Table 13 shows the results for AMS using an earlier version of scheme C with 100 top-up seats. In 1997 conditions, it again performs more fairly than the equivalent AV-Plus scheme, but its DV score of over 12 per cent makes it nearly 3 percentage points worse than the AMS scheme B and 1.4 points worse than scheme A. Most of the top-up seats lost under scheme C would be in urban areas so that Labour's representation is particularly boosted. The Liberal Democrats would not se-

cure seats in 28, or 36 per cent, of the mainland top-up areas (36 per cent). In 1992 conditions, there are too few top-up seats under scheme C to push the national result into the fully proportional range.

THE 'DANGER' OF SPLIT-TICKET TACTICAL VOTING

The double-ballot is an important feature of the AV-Plus scheme, allowing people to vote one way at local level and another at the top-up stage. However, it is argued that giving people two votes offers scope for 'split-ticket' tactical voting which would damage both the greater proportionality of the new scheme and its ability to avoid 'electoral deserts'. This section gives the results of a sensitivity analysis conducted for the Commission by Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts on the basis of the AV-Plus scheme as it existed in mid-September 1998, with 113 top-up seats in Great Britain, allocated in 78 top-up areas. (This scheme is essentially the same as the Commission's scheme A, but the seat figures in Table 14 below differ by five seats from those in the up-to-date Table 7 above.)

Any electoral system can create incentives for tactical voting, even if it is fully proportional. But some systems can be particularly sensitive to the effects of the strategic behaviour of voters. FPTP is certainly one of these, as Michael Portillo and other Tory MPs in 'safe' seats know to their cost. The columnist Peter Kellner argued (in the *Evening Standard* of 7 September 1998 and on BBC2's *Newsnight* the same day) that an AV-Plus system with a large majority of

local seats and far fewer top-up seats is especially vulnerable to large-scale tactical voting if people choose to cast their votes for top-up MPs differently from their constituency votes.

Kellner's basic argument was that Labour voters in top-up areas where their party has won a surfeit of local seats and cannot hope to secure top-up seats could shift their top-up votes to the Liberal Democrats in sufficiently heavy numbers to squeeze out one or more possible Tory top-up MPs in these areas. He claimed that about a third of Labour voters behaving in this way could have relegated the Conservatives in 1997 to third place in the Commons, even though they were clearly second in the popular vote.

There are strong reasons for doubting whether such a scenario, or its Conservative equivalent, is likely to occur in practice. First, Kellner assumed that the top-up areas would be regional, whereas the far smaller top-up areas would be less susceptible to large-scale manipulation and the effects of any organised tactical strike would be more contained. will Further, with only one or two top-up MPs per area, a second-placed party unrepresented in local seats may well have piled up a significant lead in votes over the third-placed party – requiring a lot of tactical voting for this

lead to be over-turned under the d'Hondt counting system (which tends to favour large parties).

The culture of Britain's political parties also runs strongly against any such organised strategy, even though local parties did in 1997 covertly encourage tactical voting. It would also be an unusually confident party which decided that it would cream off all the local seats – and then determined to ask its voters to vote for another party. There are clear risks in such a strategy for Labour (say). Could party organisers be sure that the only effect of encouraging its voters to switch to the Liberal Democrats at the top-up stage would be to squeeze out the Tories? For over quite a short period, the perceived viability of the Liberal Democrats may improve, as indeed it has already done under FPTP in seats like Cheltenham, as a result of conscious and unconscious tactical voting by Labour supporters. They could then become serious rivals to Labour for local seats, especially if local Tory voters also began to see the Liberal Democrats as a more electable 'opposition' party. This kind of process has already occurred at local government level in Labour strongholds such as Liverpool and Sheffield. Finally, the ability of political parties to organise such complex manoeuvres must be in doubt.

As for the voters themselves, not many more than one in ten attempt to vote tactically, and fewer still achieve their objective. First, they must vote in the right direction in the right constituencies to achieve their goal.

Much tactical voting misfires because the voters simply get it wrong, or because of countervailing tactical decisions by different groups of voters.

We have assessed how vulnerable to 'split-ticket' tactical voting AV-Plus would have been in the very different conditions of 1997 and 1992. We examined all 78 top-up areas in Great Britain in both election years to identify those where

- the leading party wins all or the bulk of local seats, so that voters could foresee that this party would not be able to win a top-up seat; and
- the leading party has a convincing lead in terms of vote shares over the second-placed party within that top-up area. This criterion ensures that the political dominance of the leading party is visible to voters, since it is not just an artefact of hard-to-anticipate seat allocations.

For each such seat we calculated the minimum amount of tactical voting by the leading party's supporters which would be necessary to raise the third-placed party above the second and thus to win a top-up seat if absolutely everyone who could vote tactically did so. In 1997, there were 35 areas where Labour vote-switching could in such extreme circumstances cost the Tories a seat, and two cases where the reverse effect could apply. In 1992, there were 21 cases where Labour voters, and 12 where Conservative voters, could bring about seat losses for their opponents.

What is important, however, is the

likely level of vote-switching required to trigger these losses. In 1997 for instance if a more realistic 10 per cent of voters for Labour and the Conservatives in vulnerable top-up areas 'split' their votes, the Conservatives would have lost nine seats and Labour one, giving the Liberal Democrats ten more seats. In 1992, the Conservatives could have lost five seats and Labour three, adding eight seats to the Liberal Democrats' total. It is only at an extreme level of tactical voting, such as the 30 per cent assumed by Peter Kellner, that there is a significant effect. At that level, 23 Conservative and two Labour seats could have been lost in 1997, and 17 Tory and eight Labour in 1992. The Conservatives in fact would have been badly hit in 1997 if more than 15 per cent of Labour voters split their votes tactically.

But what overall damage would concerted split voting inflict on the proportionality of elections under AV-Plus? As we have explained above, it is possible to measure deviation from proportionality (see p. 9) and give it a score (the 'DV score') for the sake of comparison. In 1997, we calculate that the DV score under AV-Plus would have remained basically unchanged right up to levels of split-voting just below Kellner's 30 per cent. Only at or above that level – with 30 per cent of Labour and Tory supporters voting tactically for top-up MPs and doing so with remarkable accuracy, all voting the right way in the right constituencies – would a tiny adverse effect reveal itself. In 1992, split-ticket tactical voting by both Tory and La-

bour supporters would actually improve the DV score, by raising the representation of the Liberal Democrats to more proportional levels and reducing in a more even-handed way the over-representation of the other two main parties. The DV score falls rapidly at all levels of tactical voting and, at Kellner's 30 per cent point, the score would actually be halved. So AV-Plus system would then be operating within the fully-proportional range! Thus split-ticket tactical voting is not at all the great danger for democracy which the ingenious Kellner supposed (see Dunleavy and Margetts, LSE-Birkbeck 1998, for more detailed figures).

There would however be one adverse consequence. Split-ticket voting of this kind would somewhat offset the effect which an AV-Plus electoral system would otherwise have in improving the representation of other parties in areas of one-party dominance (Jenkins's 'electoral deserts'). Substantial split-ticket tactical voting would erode AV-Plus's ability to broaden the regional base of the Conservative and Labour parties (though, of course, it would not increase the leading party's predominance).

But it is worth noting as well that split-ticket voting would primarily reflect the expansion of voter choice which the scheme allows. The Conservatives lost out badly in 1997 because a large body of voters for other parties were also very hostile to them. Had the policies and performance of the Conservatives in government reflected more sensitively

what the public wanted, this marked hostility would not have existed. It might be argued that the adoption of an electoral system which penalises parties which get so out of touch with people's wishes would expand political accountability to the people, and is to be preferred over a system, such as FPTP, which encourages parties to try merely to 'bounce' the people's wishes by gaining a Commons majority by winning over a 42-44 per cent minority of the electorate.

But how much split-ticket tactical voting is really likely? Our figures are based on the assumption that the tactical voting would be undertaken by perfectly informed voters who could accurately foresee the results in their top-up area. They would need to know far more than they require now voting in a single constituency under FPTP. Split-ticket tactical voters would need to know the political conditions in their local seat *and* the likely outcomes in another four to ten seats in their top-up area. But many voters won't have this level of information in many areas. It may be fairly clear to Labour supporters in Glasgow for instance, but could the same be said for the party's voters in north east London?

A change in the way we vote will clearly set in train dynamic effects, but as we have stressed in all our work on electoral reform, these effects can not be scientifically estimated. It is very likely that voters in the first election under a new system will be very unclear how it is going to work. It is also probable that any net tactical vot-

ing effects will take time to emerge, as a result of 'social learning'. Over the same period, however, political parties will also have time to modify their campaigning strategies to guard against or to exploit tactical voting potential.

Overall, we judge that between 5 and 15 per cent of voters as a whole are likely to choose in divergent ways between the constituency and the top-up area votes under the Commission's AV-Plus scheme. The level of 'net', or effective, tactical voting is likely to be below 10 per cent. There is undoubtedly some potential for the Liberal Democrats to advance at the top-up stage, but there could also be countervailing effects reflecting that party's weaker hold over its voters and stronger local than national identity. The net effects on the parties' overall national seat total are likely to be small.

There is a simple remedy to widespread split-ticket tactical voting – a shift to a one-vote mixed system. But this would directly restrict an important element of voter choice in the Commission's schema simply to avoid a theoretical problem which is anyway unlikely to distort election results and may even improve their proportionality.

It is worth recording the evidence showing that voters appreciate and use the greater degree of choice made possible by split-ticket voting. More than one in three voters in New Zealand's first election in 1996 under a 'classic' Additional Member System (with a 50:50 division of local and top-

up seats) made different choices at the two stages of the AMS ballot, even though most parties stood to gain at least some top-up seats across the country. One in eight voters in Germany also exercise their right to split their vote. In our 1997 work on modelling the future of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly (*Devolution Votes*, Democratic Audit, 1997), we found that 15 per cent of voters were prepared to split their vote in Scotland. Subsequent opinion polls in Scotland have begun to show similar levels of split-ticket voting intentions.

THE REPRESENTATION OF SMALL OR 'EXTREME' PARTIES

One of the most common criticisms of proportional electoral schemes is that they fragment the political spectrum by increasing the ability of very small parties to secure a seat in the legislature. There is a particular fear that a party representing an extreme populist, ethnic identification or racist viewpoint might gain a parliamentary bridgehead and perhaps exert an influence out of all proportion to its following simply by virtue of it holding a tactical, or even 'hinge', position in Parliament. The quite atypical example of Israel is often held up as a warning against any kind of proportional system.

We do not intend to enter into the merits of such fears, or the underlying political viewpoint to which they give expression, except to point out that the advent of new parties, as with the Greens in Germany, or the advance of a small party such as the Scottish Nationalists in Scotland, can reinvigorate the political process and could improve parliamentary representation of our increasingly pluralist society. Here we concern ourselves with the question of whether the Commission's AV-Plus scheme requires a

formal threshold, of the kind which Germany has, to protect the body politic from very small parties gaining an undue influence in the House of Commons on a fraction of the popular vote.

Germany, in fact, applies the quite high threshold of 5 per cent of the total vote, victory in a local seat, or before it can qualify for a top-up seat. However, Germany and other nations which set a threshold for entry to their parliaments operate fully proportional schemes, and the essence of AV-Plus is that it deliberately is not fully proportional, precisely to support the larger parties and to make single-party government the norm.

Dunleavy and Margetts undertook extensive analysis of the effective thresholds created under AV-Plus on behalf of the Commission. They concentrated on the largest top-up areas – with 11 MPs – because the larger constituencies are, the more likely are small parties to win seats. Here we present a brief summary of their analysis (for further detail, see their report to the Commission, LSE/Birkbeck 1998). Their figures are theoretical and assume a proportional allocation of local seats within the top-up areas. Very broadly, within the

larger top-up areas where their best chances of gaining seats are to be found, small parties would have to secure more than 8 per cent of the vote in the area, or some 28,000 votes, to be sure of gaining a seat. The lowest percentage of the total vote which would have secured a top-up seat in the simulated election results prepared for the Commission was the 10.9 per cent scored by the Liberal Democrats in Nottinghamshire.

These are in effect very high thresholds and the Commission has rightly concluded that there is no need to set a formal figure. There is no danger of an extremist party scaling the effective thresholds built into its scheme. We have examined the voting histories of the National Front and British National Party in national and local elections and they have never polled the levels of voters which would be required across a whole top-up area to gain a seat in the House of Commons under AV-Plus.

THE TREATMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND

The Commission wanted to recommend a voting system which could be applied with equal validity throughout the United Kingdom, but Northern Ireland already had a distinctive voting system of its own, separate from that for the UK as a whole. The single transferable vote (STV), which is the system used in Ireland, is also used for electing the Northern Ireland Assembly, local authorities and MEPs in the province. However, the Commission found that representative organisations in Northern Ireland also wanted to have the same system as applied throughout the UK (even though some wanted that system to be STV).

As is well known, Northern Ireland has a completely separate and distinctive party system in which the main line of cleavage has long been a sectarian one. Assessing alternative electoral outcomes here is complicated by the larger number of observable parties, with at least 12 principal parties that might win seats under a reasonably proportional electoral system. The constituencies nearly all have idiosyncratic local features which set them apart from their neighbours, not least sharply varying balances of electors on either side of the sectarian line. This feature of local politics had clear implications for pairing of constituencies necessary to

calculate results for a 50:50 'classic' AMS or AV-Plus system.

We examined four possible arrangements of the 18 seats in Northern Ireland, which would allow an AMS or AV-Plus scheme to be implemented. They are:

- a province-wide scheme with 14 local seats, plus four top-up seats (22 per cent of all MPs);
- a scheme with two top-up areas, one a ten-seater, the other with eight seats (including two top-up seats each);
- the same scheme of a ten-seater and an eight-seater top-up area, but this time giving the eight-seater a single MP (thus providing only three top-up MPs in the province), comprising 16.7 per cent of all MPs;
- a scheme with three six-seat top-up areas, each including one top-up MP (again 16.7 per cent of all MPs).

We had no reliable data on the second or subsequent preferences of voters at the 1997 general election. Hence we can only present AMS projections for this election. We obtained information on second and subsequent preferences for the Northern Ireland Assembly election, held under STV in 1998, from an exit poll of 2,193 respondents (with a weighted value of 1,637 people). The poll was

carried out as people left the Assembly election polling stations by Ulster Marketing Services for RTE, the Irish state broadcasting corporation. This election marked a big change in the politics of the province; the Unionist bloc split in two with 'YES Unionists' backing the peace agreement, and 'NO Unionists' opposing it. The vote for the Ulster Unionist Party fell to a record low of 21 per cent, and the Democratic Unionist Party achieved 18 per cent. It is too early to say if this effect is a one-off, or a harbinger of a longer-term change. We are able to provide an AV-Plus projection for Northern Ireland, based on the 1998 election, though people were voting for a devolved assembly and not for Westminster, and the different mix of issues and responsibilities across the two bodies may have occasioned different expressions of preferences. Further, voting behaviour under STV may be systematically different from that under AV, and we have by definition excluded from our analysis 'loyalist' voters who chose only to vote for their first preference party.

Table 14 shows the result of the Assembly election replayed under the AV-Plus model that the Commission recommends for use in Northern Ireland – two top-up areas with two top-up MPs each. The deviation from proportionality (DV) score is very high at 17.9 per cent, reflecting in part the fact that almost 15 per cent of the initial vote went to small parties which did not win a seat, and would be denied a seat under almost any electoral system. Otherwise, the main source

of deviation is the over-representation of the Ulster Unionists in local seats (though, with AV, these results reflect the transfer of support from other unionist parties). This result differs little from that of a province-wide AV-Plus election. The DV score is the same, but the SDLP would gain one seat fewer and the Ulster Unionists one more in a province-wide contest. In an election using three six-seater constituencies, with one top-up seat each, the DV score rises by ten percentage points, chiefly because the Alliance Party does not win a seat and Sinn Féin get only two. The DUP and Ulster Unionists gain one seat each from these changes.

An alternative way of assessing the results is to look at the outcomes by blocs rather than by parties (Table 15). This enables us to compute a 'bloc' DV score which compensates for the presence of smaller parties, and to suggest how legitimate the election results are likely to seem. The Commission's two top-up area schema cuts the projected DV score by more than half to 4.6 per cent, by comparison with a notional FPTP outcome (10.2 per cent), and a province-wide scheme to 5.4 per cent. By contrast, the three six-seater scheme yields a DV score even higher than under FPTP.

It is possible to re-run the 1997 elections in Northern Ireland under an AMS equivalent of the Jenkins AV-Plus scheme (i.e., using FPTP for the local seat elections instead of AV). (This cannot be done for AV-Plus itself because we have no useful data

Table 14: The 1998 Assembly election re-run under AV-Plus with a ten-seater and an eight seater top-up areas each inc two top-up MPs

	SDLP	SF	DUP	UU	APNI	UKU	PROG	UDP	CON	Other union	Others	NLP	Total	DV score
Local seats	4	3	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	
Top-up seats	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	
Seats under AV-Plus	5	3	3	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	
% Votes shares	22	17.6	17.8	21.3	6.5	4.5	2.5	1.5	0.2	2.8	3.2	0.1	100	
% Seat shares under AV-Plus	27.8	16.7	16.7	33.3	5.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100	17.9

Notes: SDLP=Social Democratic and Labour Party; SF Sinn Fein; DUP Democratic Unionist Party; UU Ulster Unionist Party; APNI Alliance Party of Northern Ireland; UKU UK Unionist Party; PROG Progressive Unionist Party; UDP Ulster Democratic Party; CON Conservative; Others includes the Workers Party, Women’s Coalition, independents; Other Union – includes all other unionist parties; NLP Natural Law Party.

Table 15: Results of an AV Plus re-run of the 1998 Assembly Election by bloc

The Commission’s scheme (2 top-up areas with 2 top-up MPs each)				
	<i>Nationalist bloc</i>	<i>Non-aligned & other parties</i>	<i>Unionist bloc</i>	<i>Bloc DV score</i>
Seats under plurality rule	8	0	10	
Seats under AV Plus	8	1	9	
% vote share	39.6	9.6	49.6	
% seats under plurality rule	44.4	0	55.6	10.2
% seats under AV-Plus	44.4	5.6	50	4.6
A province-wide scheme with four top-up seats				
Seats under AV Plus	7	1	10	
% seats under AV Plus	38.9	5.6	55.6	5.4
Three six seat top-up areas, each with one top-up MP				
Seats under AV Plus	7	0	11	
% seats under AV Plus	38.9	0	61.1	10.8

on voters’ second and subsequent preferences.) With two top-up areas of ten and eight seats (including two top-up seats each), the exact equivalent of the Commission’s AV-Plus model, the outcomes for the nationalist parties and unionists would be

more evenly distributed and the deviation from proportionality would be far lower than in the actual election – at 14.9 per cent as against 26.8 per cent under FPTP. A province-wide AMS scheme would give the nationalist parties three more seats than

FPTP, take three seats from the Ulster Unionists, and allocate one seat to the Alliance. Accordingly, it would be even more proportional, at 10.5 per cent. (Bear in mind in that 4 per cent of the vote went to small parties which may well not win seats under any conceivable electoral system.) Assessed on a bloc basis, both AMS schemes would be far lower than the actual bloc DV under FPTP in 1997 (21.5 per cent), but the AMS equivalent to the Commission's two top-up area scheme is, at 10.5 per cent, twice as high as under the province-wide version (4.2 per cent). The province-wide scheme again represents the two main blocs accurately and awards a seat to the Alliance. The Alliance keeps its seat under the two top-up area scheme, but the balance between the two main blocs tips back by two seats towards the unionist side.

These results strongly suggest that having four top-up seats makes an important contribution to producing more proportional outcomes. The province-wide scheme, using either FPTP or AV for the local seats, is clearly more proportional than other models, including the Commission's own, and always gives the Alliance a seat, thereby broadening party representation. However, province-wide top-up MPs in Northern Ireland would be more remote representatives than in the rest of the country, and given this consideration, the Commission scheme has enough to commend it too. It ought not to be assumed, finally, that STV would produce more proportional results. Given the size of

the votes for small parties, unlikely to secure representation under STV, we would expect its performance to be worse than either AV-Plus schemes or their AMS equivalents.

CONCLUSIONS

The Jenkins Commission has produced a bold and ingenious solution to its difficult brief. It has retained the much-prized constituency links, but has nonetheless devised a way of securing some parliamentary representation for the vast majority of voters, wherever they live in the country. The incentives for voting will be strengthened, and voters will be more able to exercise effective choices, both locally and at the top-up area level.

The AV-Plus scheme is not fully proportional and to the extent that it is not, elections in Britain will continue to allocate seats to parties who have not won them on their share of the vote. But it will be significantly more proportional, and more reliably proportional over different kinds of elections, than plurality rule. It will spread representation. In 1997, it would have given the Conservatives eight seats in Scotland, six in Wales, and 28 in the metropolitan areas of England outside London – all zones where they won no or almost no representation under plurality rule. Similarly, in 1992, Labour would have gained 25 seats across south-east England and East Anglia (instead of six) and the Liberal Democrats 14 seats (instead of none).

In close elections, the new system will be nearly proportional, and coa-

lition governments may result. In years when the electorate has reached a decisive view about the need for a government change, AV-Plus will cut back the unwon landslide parliamentary majorities which voters dislike and which make a mockery of the idea of opposition in the Commons. But it will still allow for single-party governments whenever a party gains around 44-45 per cent of the vote with a strong lead over the second-placed party.

AV-Plus is well adapted to the contours of British party politics since the early 1970s when the current pattern of alignments was first defined. In the two 1974 elections, perhaps in 1979 and certainly in 1992, AV-Plus elections would have brought forth either coalition governments, or minority Conservative or Labour governments. This may seem a radical change, but under FPTP the two 1974 elections produced first a minority Labour government, and then a marginal Labour government which soon lost its small overall majority. And though in 1992 John Major won a working majority which lasted for five years, his own intra-party coalition fragmented over Europe, and the Conservatives only enacted the Maastricht Treaty after receiving crucial Parliamentary support from the Liberal Democrats. In 1983, 1987 and 1997, the Jenkins scheme would certainly have pro-

duced the same single-party governments, although with smaller overall majorities and much stronger incentives for the governments to pursue policies which commanded a broad level of public agreement.

Thus it is only 1979 which *might* have been completely different under AV-Plus, and we do not have sufficiently good data on people's second preferences to be able to say whether or not a Tory majority government would have resulted.

In many ways, then, the Jenkins scheme can claim to represent the 'best of both worlds'. It creates the stronger incentives for people to use their votes which have meant that PR elections in Europe generally have much stronger levels of turnout than in Britain. It prevents political parties from developing strategies to appeal only to a large minority of the electorate, and it vitiates for ever the attempt by people of many different ideological persuasions to capture one of the great British parties by organisational means and then use its historical weight to try and 'bounce' the electorate into accepting unpopular policies.

At the same time, the Commission was alert to the danger that, in British conditions, a fully-proportional system could vest too much political power in the hands of a large centrist party, the Liberal Democrats – making them a 'hinge' party that would be required permanently for coalition governments to be formed. By allowing for single-party governments to alternate with coalitions, Jenkins has

prevented the danger of 'PR sclerosis' in British government, and retained incentives for bold and broad-based popular leadership in the Conservative and Labour parties to seek overall command. British voters will still have the ability to 'throw the rascals out', but they will also escape the danger of large artificial majorities creating 'electoral dictatorship' and narrowly-based 'strong' government being foisted on a public most of whom have not voted for it.

The key to realising this balancing trick was the decision to go for local top-up areas with a limited quota of top-up MPs. This bold move cuts through the common aversion to electoral systems which create the 'flocks' of list MPs, beholden only to party managers and wheeling well above local accountability. Instead, every top-up MP will be selected for a local area, often with an established historical identity, good public visibility, and generally existing party organisations capable of organising a democratic selection process for these candidates. In just over half the top-up areas, there will be a single top-up MP, who will always be the representative of the main opposition party in areas where one party is dominant. Where the Conservatives and Labour more or less share local seats evenly, the Liberal Democrats, SNP or Plaid Cymru, will win the top-up seat. In the 36 areas with two top-up seats, these third or fourth parties will usually take one of these extra places if they have not already won a local seat.

None of these advantages means

that the Jenkins proposals are 'perfect'. No electoral scheme ever is. The use of AV at local level is not good news for the Conservatives. In 1997, the Conservatives would still have been badly under-represented, why is why Lord Alexander's minority report argues the case for a FPTP local base instead, and argues it well. An AMS equivalent of AV-Plus would be more proportional than AV-Plus itself. In 1997, it would have given the Tories 25 more seats, as it would specifically work more proportionally in the hostile conditions of 1997 (though not necessarily so, say, when the Tories are in the ascendant, as in 1983). It would also be more consistent with the AMS schemes intended for elections to the Scottish Parliament, and Welsh and London assemblies, and perhaps in local government elections as well. Lastly, the FPTP element is familiar and simple to use.

But an AMS scheme would also have its drawbacks. It would not extend voters' choices in constituency elections, as AV (and the supplementary vote) would; and so it would recreate tactical voting problems for many voters. It would also mean that many local MPs would continue to take their seats on a minority of the local vote.

Another alternative might be to substitute the supplementary vote for AV. SV-Plus would produce exactly the same results in terms of seats and government as AV-Plus, but the ballot papers and counting would be simpler. Arguments against 'wacky' second and subsequent preferences of

people voting for more marginal candidates, and the weight generally given to such preferences, would not be able to confuse the debate. Further, SV is to be used for the election of London mayors and any other mayors thereafter.

For smaller parties, like the Greens or an anti-Europe party, it would be hard to win seats under the Jenkins formula, since the effective threshold would be about 8 per cent of the top-up vote in the largest areas where their chances of winning would be greatest. Where local seats are not in practice proportionately allocated, or top-up areas are smaller, the real threshold may be as high as 11-12 per cent. Such thresholds will be hard to climb, but at least smaller parties now have far more of an incentive to try and build up support, and they will be assisted by the use of AV in constituency contests where people can split their votes and give, say, a Green candidate the nod with a first preference vote.

Another virtue of the realism inherent in the Jenkins package is the space it leaves for recommendations to evolve as the public debate on electoral reform unfolds. This is particularly true of the Commission's decision not to choose between the three varying ratios of top-up to constituency MPs, but to leave the final choice to be debated further. Our analysis shows that the 80:20 mix would significantly improve the overall proportionality of the scheme without substantially reducing the strength of local representation or the

chances of single-party governments coming into power. The consequences for any one party would be negligible. But adding a mere 15 extra top-up MPs would reduce the number of top-up areas with only one top-up MPs to a minority (29 out of 80) and reduce deviations from proportionality appreciably in all kinds of electoral conditions. It would systematically strengthen the representation of underdogs and reduce rather more the over-representation of locally-dominant parties.

A government commitment to an 80:20 mix in the referendum on the Jenkins proposals would be a sign of a party in tune with the more diverse politics of contemporary Britain. But before that we require a commitment to a referendum before the next election.

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The Democratic Audit of the United Kingdom inquires into the quality of democracy and political freedom in the UK. The Democratic Audit has published two major studies. *Political Power and Democratic Control in Britain*, by Stuart Weir and David Beetham (Routledge), analyses the power of government in this country, its openness and accountability. *Three Pillars of Liberty*, by Francesca Klug, Keir Starmer and Stuart Weir, published in September 1996 (Routledge), audits the protection of civil and political rights in the United Kingdom.

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The map

The pocket in the back cover opposite contains a map, showing the 80 top-up areas which would be established in the UK under the Electoral Commission's AV-Plus scheme. Top-up areas may have one or two top-up MPs.

The map also shows how many seats the parties would have won in these areas in 1997 under the Commission's 'middle' scheme, split 82.5:17.5 between constituency and top-up MPs. Two other schemes, with a mix of 80: 20 and 85: 15, are also put forward for debate. The index shows the number of seats which each party would hold in each area. The coloured areas indicate that a particular party would hold more than half the seats in the area (i.e., local and top-up seats). In 1997, Labour would have won over half the seats in 47 areas (coloured red); the Conservatives would have a similar majority in five areas (blue) and the Liberal Democrats in three (yellow). In the rest of the country (grey), no one party would be dominant.