

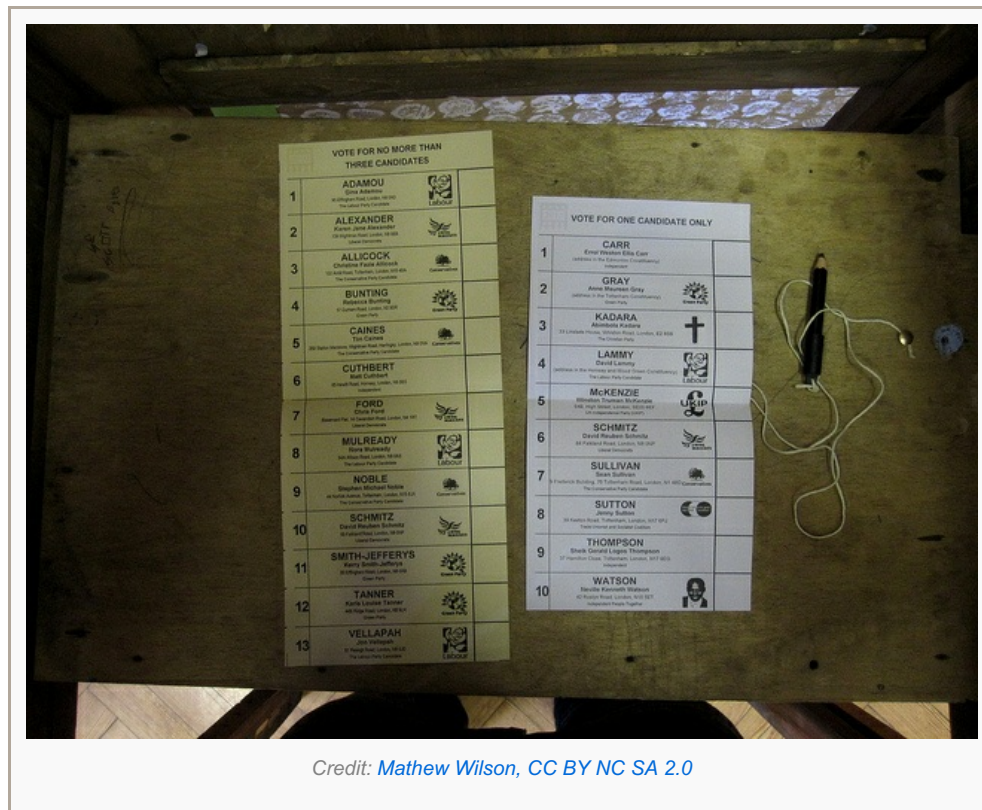
The 2015 General Election was further proof that First Past the Post is not fit for purpose

democraticaudit.com/2015/06/16/the-2015-general-election-was-further-proof-that-first-past-the-post-is-not-fit-for-purpose/

By Democratic Audit UK

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*The 2015 General Election produced an unexpected majority government, however it did so despite the rise of smaller parties such as the Greens and UKIP, who between them only won 2 seats, despite polling around 5 million votes. **Chris Terry** and **Jess Garland** argue that the result shows that the First Past the Post electoral system is now chronically out of date, with territorial and cultural divisions being hardened by a crude, majoritarian system.*



The 2015 general election once again underlined the multitude of problems with Britain's electoral system.

For the third election in a row, no party won more than 40%, let alone a majority of the vote, yet the Conservative Party won 50.9% of the seats for its 36.9% support.

Yet this headline figure hides several other major anomalies. UKIP won 12.6% of the vote and just a single seat. Meanwhile the Liberal Democrats won 7.9% and eight seats. The Green Party won 3.8% of the vote and one MP, while the SNP secured 4.7% of the vote and 56. Clearly, people's votes bear little relation to the number of seats won.

These disproportionalities aside, the unfairness of the system can be seen in the 25.7 million people who we, at the Electoral Reform Society, estimated lived in safe seats earlier this year. It can also be seen in the approximately three million people who felt they had to vote tactically, or the almost three quarters of votes which were wasted in this election – i.e. they didn't contribute to electing an MP.

More locally, constituency results continue to be absurd. Only 24.5% of voters in Belfast South voted for the winner, the SDLP's Alastair McDonnell – setting a new record for the lowest ever vote share for a winning candidate. All in

all, 332 MPs were elected on less than half the votes in their constituency.

But Britain's First Past the Post the electoral system does not just result in national inequities. It is also increasingly threatening to pull the UK apart. Each of the four nations of the UK was won by a different political party for the first time in history – each party being disproportionately over-represented within that region.

For its 50% of the vote, the SNP won 95% of the seats, with Labour, the Conservatives and Lib Dems winning just one MP each North of the border. While it is indeed the case that the Conservatives are less popular in Scotland than in England, 14.9% of Scottish voters did support them. This would equate to 9 MPs under d'Hondt PR. At the same time, Labour won just eight seats (of 139) in the South East and South West of England regions despite 1.3 million people casting votes for the party in this area.

In doing so, the system exaggerates differences and divides across the UK. It also has ramifications for the relationship between parties and regions themselves. MPs pass on the views of their constituents into policymaking and day-to-day party stances in Parliament. Without representation in Scotland, parties will find it more difficult to correctly represent views across the Union. What's more, who can speak to, as well as for, Scotland in the unionist parties? Or the same for the South of England for Labour, or the urban metropolises for the Conservatives. Our electoral system threatens to continue to divide the UK more and more as its effects on political parties continue to artificially exaggerate the divides between the nations and regions of the UK.

Britain's First Past the Post electoral system is thoroughly out of place for the society in which we now live. The rise of UKIP and the Greens has seen two parties, which together won more than five million votes, only win two seats. It has seen further inequities and anomalies in our election results – and it may be further exaggerating the political differences between the regions and the nations of the UK.

[Click here to see the full Electoral Reform Society Report; The 2015 General Election: A voting system in crisis](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Democratic Audit UK, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

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