



# General Election 2005

Talk for Association of Electoral  
Administrators conference

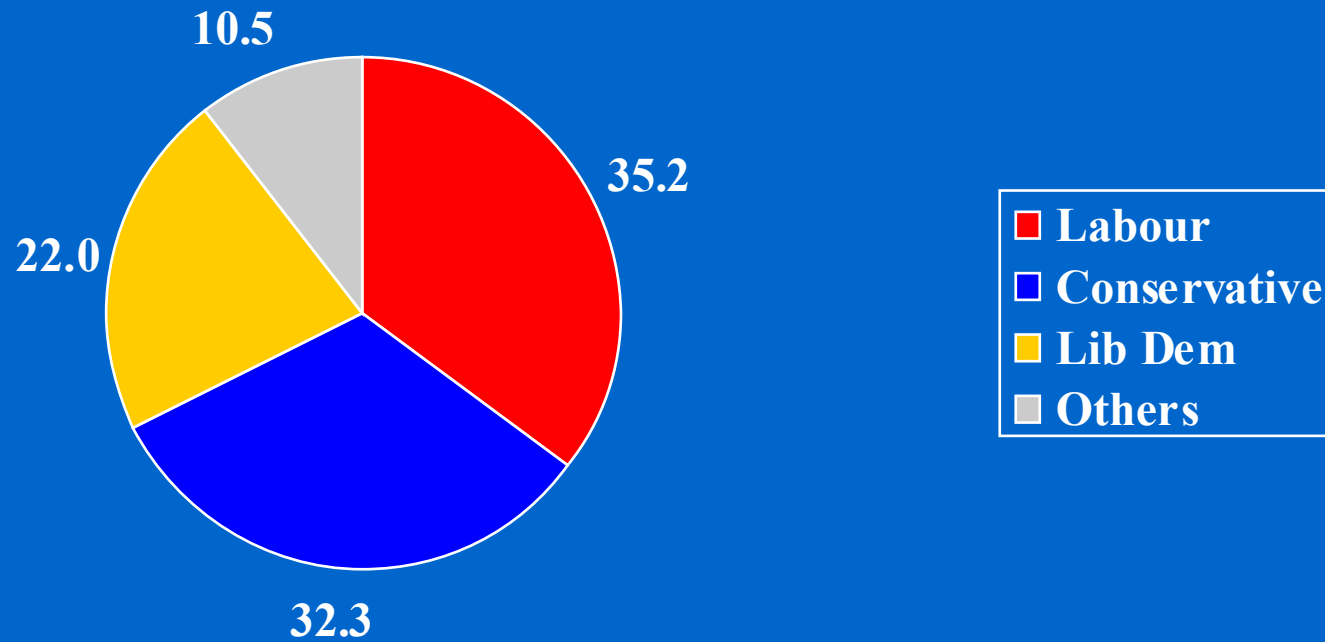
Lewis Baston

20 February 2006

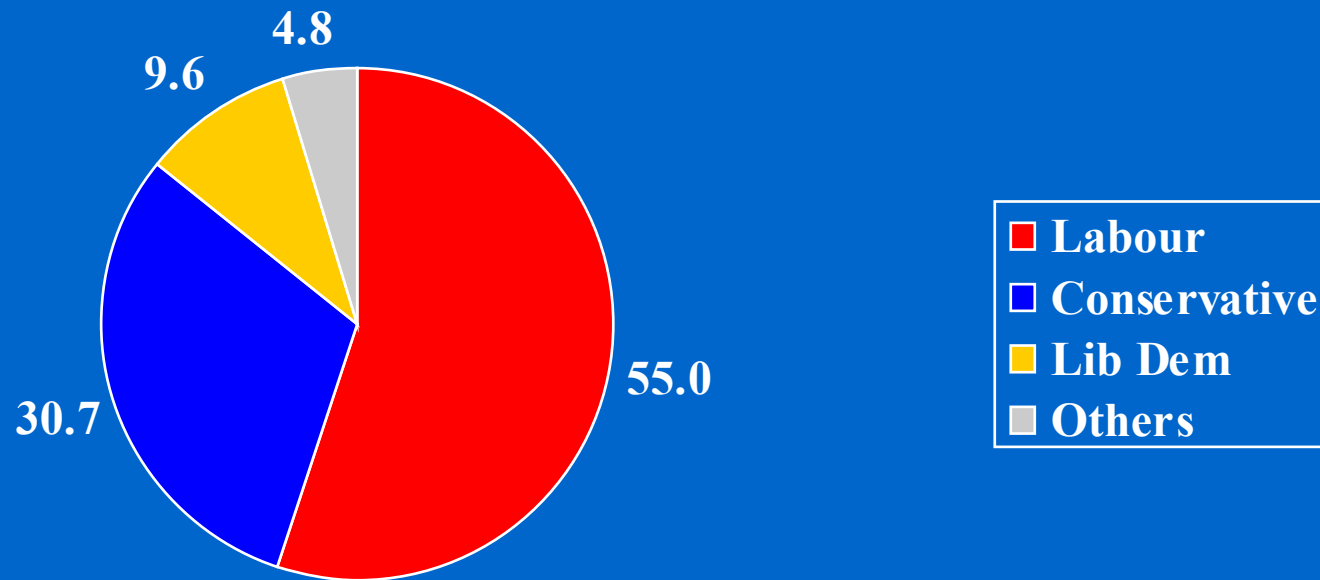
# Outline

- Votes and seats in 2005
- Why FPTP failed
- Low turnout
- Alternative electoral systems
- Prospect

# Percentage votes, 2005



# Percentage seats, 2005





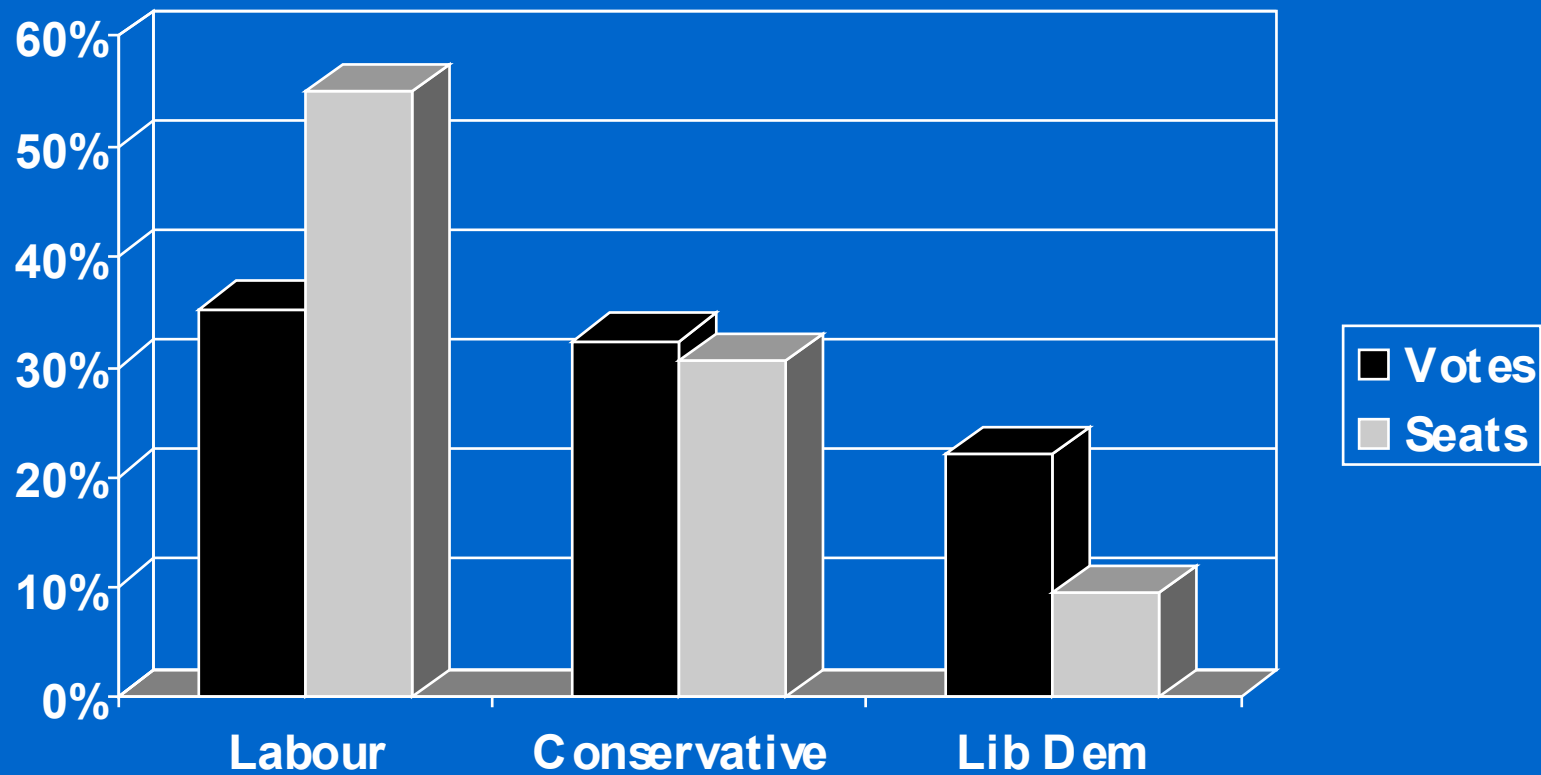
# Why and how FPTP failed



# What's wrong with the system?

- Minority rule
- Unfair representation
- Unrepresentative MPs
- Bias
- Lack of choice for voters
- Wasted votes
- Tactical voting

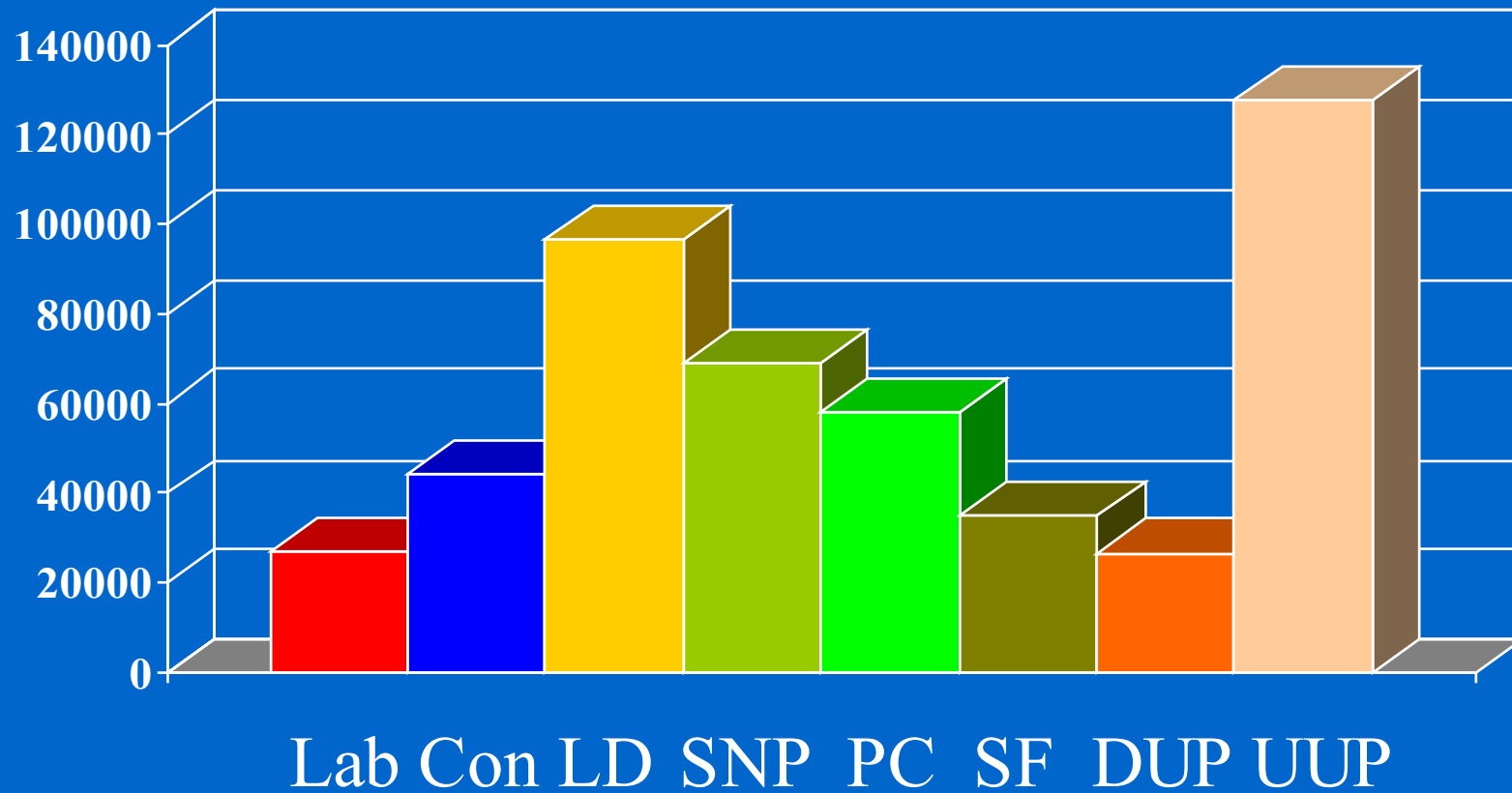
# Votes and seats in 2005



# Minority rule

- Parties can win large majorities with under 40 per cent of the vote, as in 2005.
- The nearly 65 per cent who did not vote Labour in 2005 are excluded from a say in government.
- In the 1980s the 60 per cent who did not vote Conservative were similarly excluded.
- Is it surprising that government is often thought to be remote and unresponsive?

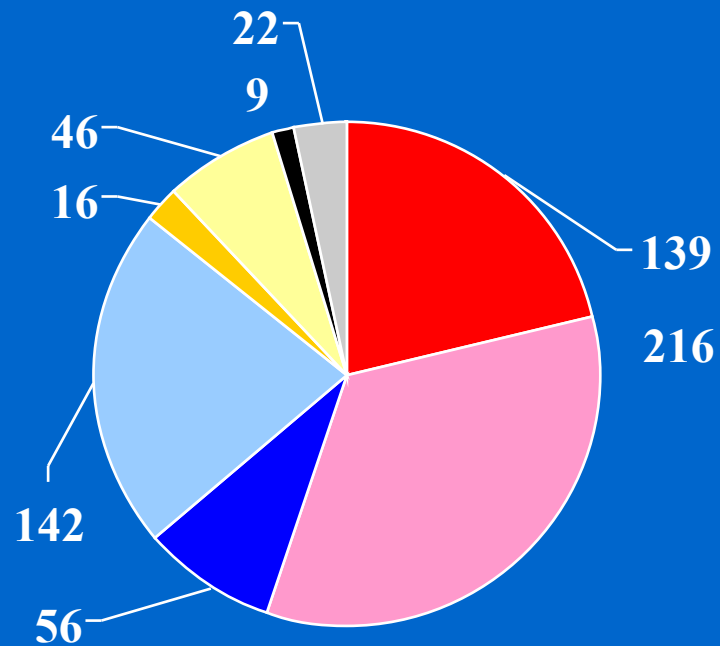
# Votes per MP by party, 2005



# Unfair representation

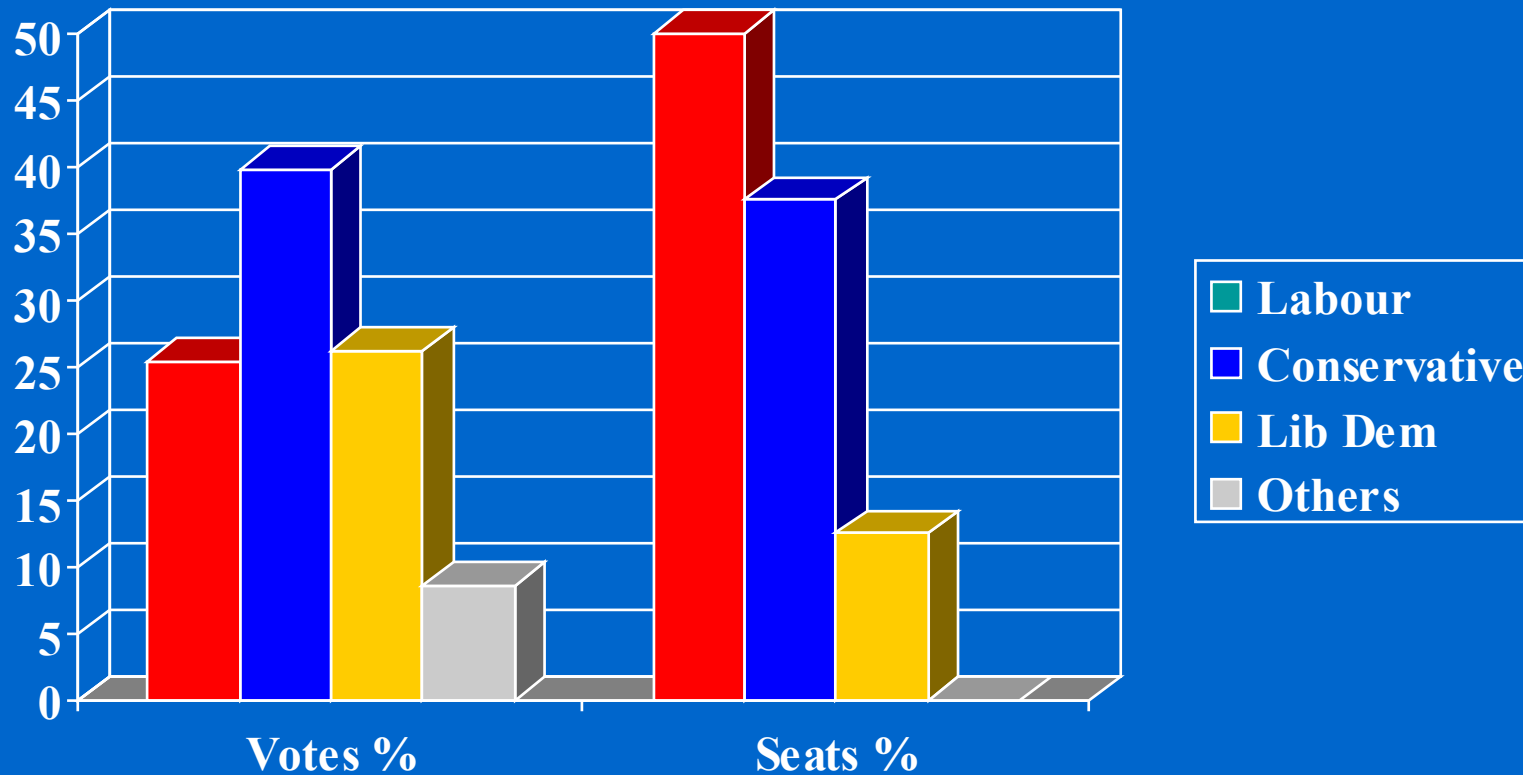
- Smaller parties with evenly spread support do badly - UKIP had 600,000 votes and no MPs
- Smaller parties with concentrated support can do well - DUP had 240,000 votes and 9 MPs
- Major parties that are weak in one area also do badly: the 1.2 million Conservative voters in the Metropolitan authorities elected 5 MPs
- Representation is more regionally and socially polarised than the party's vote

# Constituency results 2005



- Labour (majority)
- Labour (minority)
- Conservative (majority)
- Conservative (minority)
- Lib Dem (majority)
- Lib Dem (minority)
- Others (majority)
- Others (minority)

# Votes and seats in East Sussex



## Unrepresentative MPs

- In 2005 only 220 MPs had the support of a majority of voters in their constituency (34%)
- This was the lowest proportion ever
- In 2005 55 MPs were elected with less than 40% support, up from 21 in 2001
- No MP had a majority of the electorate

## Lack of voter choice

- One candidate from each party, even though parties are divided (e.g. war, social liberalism)
- Difficulty of getting minority points of view represented
- Difficulty in achieving gender and ethnic balance

## Wasted and tactical votes

- A majority of votes cast (52.4%) were for losing candidates
- A further 18.3% were surplus to the winners' requirements
- There is little incentive to vote in many safe seats
- First Past the Post creates a dilemma between effective voting and sincere voting

# Bias

- Labour won a majority of 66 with a popular vote lead of 2.9%
- If the parties had been level pegging Labour's majority would have been 26
- To draw level in seats, the Conservatives would need to be 6.3% ahead in votes
- To win outright the Conservatives need an 11.7% lead

# Bias

- The main reason is the inefficient distribution of the Conservative vote
- Differential turnout is also important - the system 'thought' Labour won by 5%
- It doesn't have much to do with the Boundary Commission, although Wales and urban areas help Labour a bit

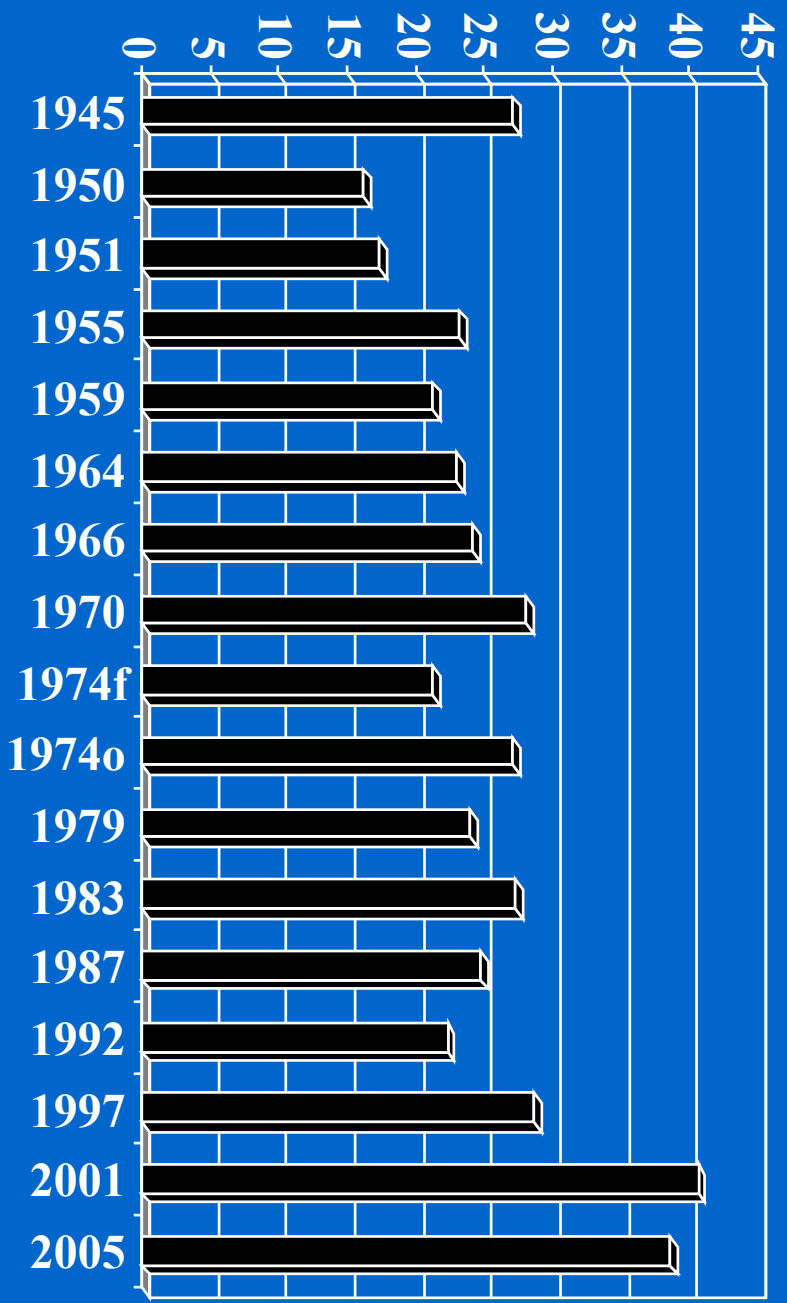
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# Turnout and electoral reform



# Abstention 1945-2005



# Response to low turnout

- Government has made it easier to vote:
- Postal voting
- Pilots of new voting methods
- Rolling registration
- Enhanced registration
- But what if people don't want to vote, no matter how easy it is?

# What's wrong with elections?

- Low turnout partly because of lack of sharp ideological divisions and one-sided nature of recent elections
- But also reflects disengagement with electoral politics, declining belief in efficacy of the vote, declining trust
- System seems to have little to offer young and poor

## What might be done?

- Make voting even easier - weekend voting, multiple polling days, e-voting anywhere
- But diminishing returns from this, and risks to election integrity
- Make voting compulsory
- Offer financial incentives to vote
- Make votes count!

# Turnout and electoral reform

- Comparative data shows PR systems tend to have turnout about 10% higher than majoritarian systems
- Each vote would be more powerful and more equal
- Reform could create a more attractive political culture
- But it's not the solution by itself

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# Alternative systems

# What are the alternatives?

- Alternative Vote (AV)
- Party lists (List PR)
- Additional Member System (AMS/  
MMP)
- Alternative Vote with top up (AV+)
- Single Transferable Vote (STV)

# Alternative Vote (AV)

- Single member constituencies as at present
- Voters rank candidates 1,2,3... in order of preference
- Winner needs 50 per cent of the vote
- Votes transferred from lowest-polling candidates if no overall winner
- Used in Australia

# Party List PR

- Multi-member elections
- Voters choose between lists of candidates put forward by parties
- Seats allocated proportionally by party
- Many different kinds of List PR: main difference is between 'open' and 'closed'
- Used for European Parliament elections in Britain, and widely in Europe

## Mixed systems (AMS/ MMP)

- Voters have two votes - a constituency vote and a list vote
- Constituency MPs elected as at present
- List MPs allocated to compensate for disproportionality of constituency result
- Used in Scottish Parliament, Welsh and London Assemblies, New Zealand, Germany

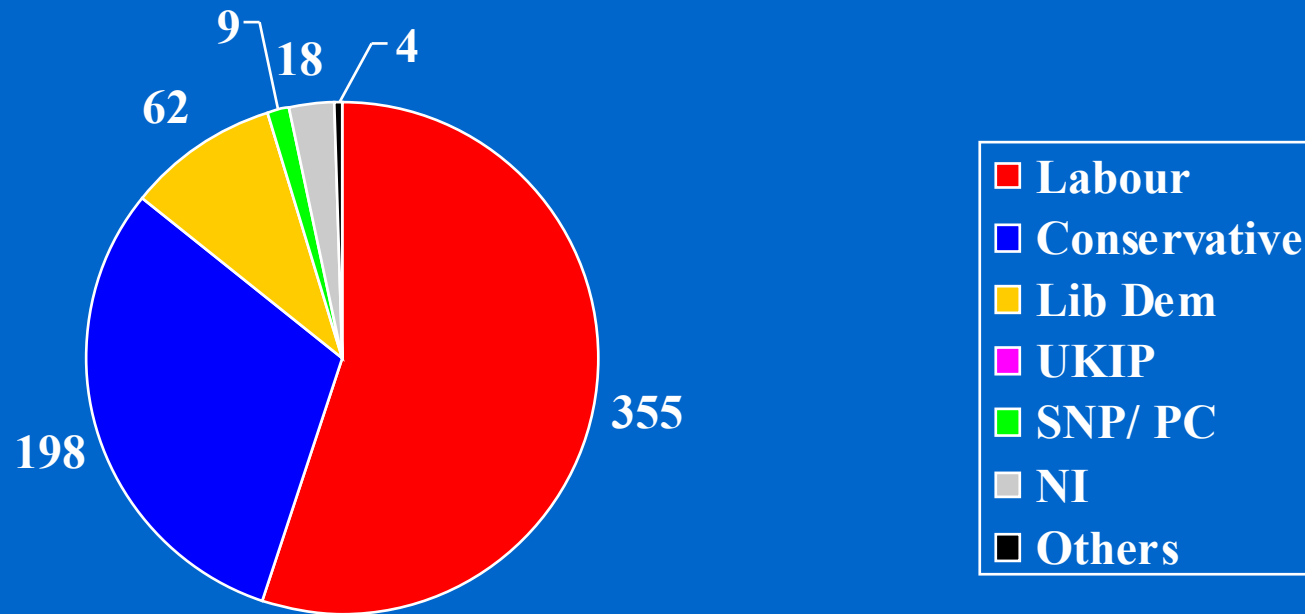
# Alternative Vote Plus (AV+)

- A variant of AMS/ MMP
- Constituency members would be elected by Alternative Vote
- Top up list members would be elected using open lists
- Recommended for the House of Commons by the Jenkins Report (1998)

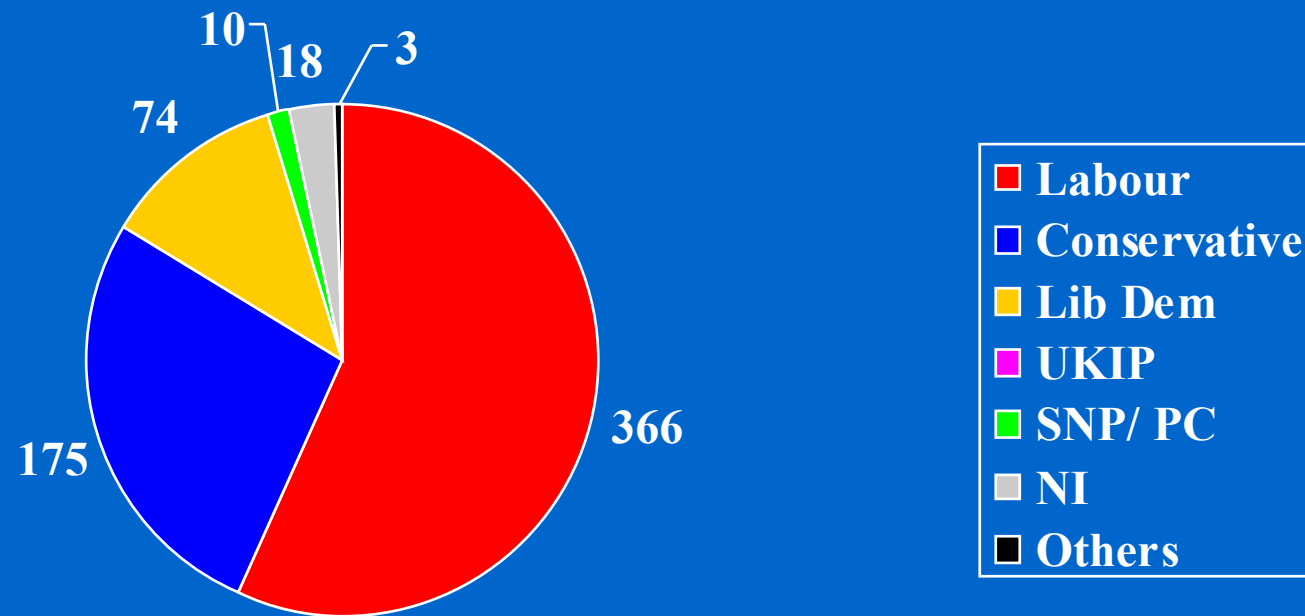
# Single Transferable Vote (STV)

- Voters rank candidates 1,2,3...
- Multi-member constituencies (usually 3-5)
- Votes are transferred when a candidate is elected with surplus votes
- Votes are transferred when low-polling candidates are eliminated
- Used in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta, Australian Senate and some states

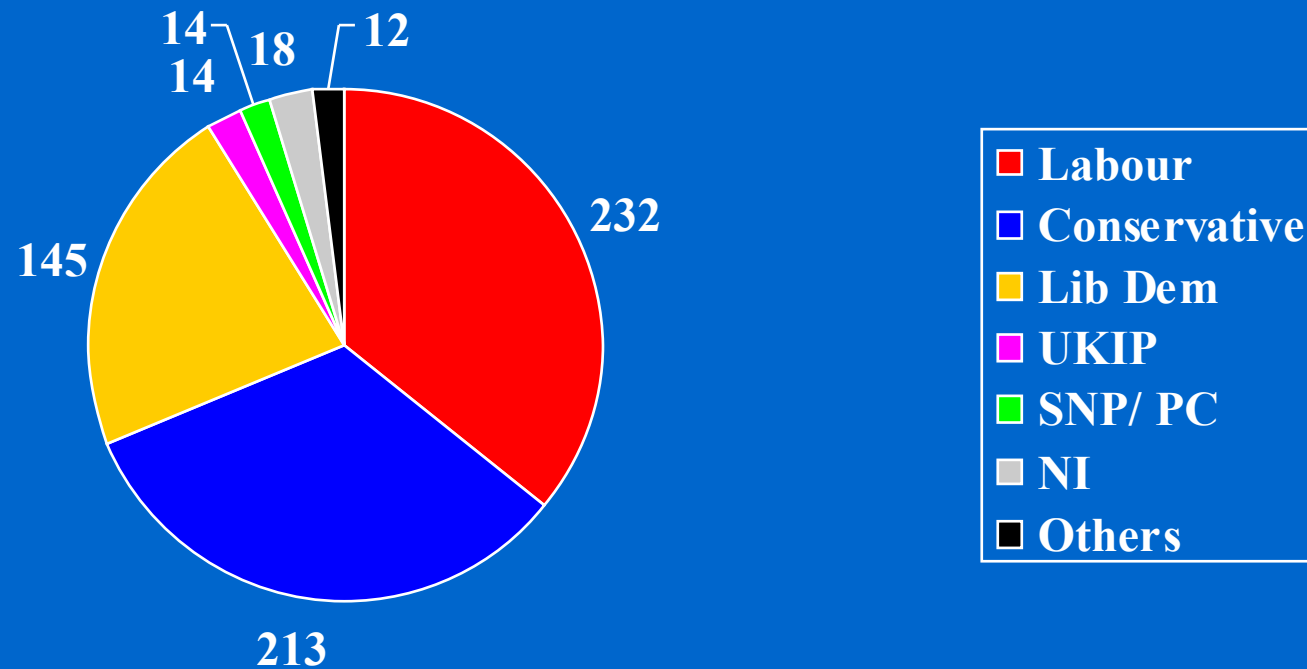
# First Past the Post



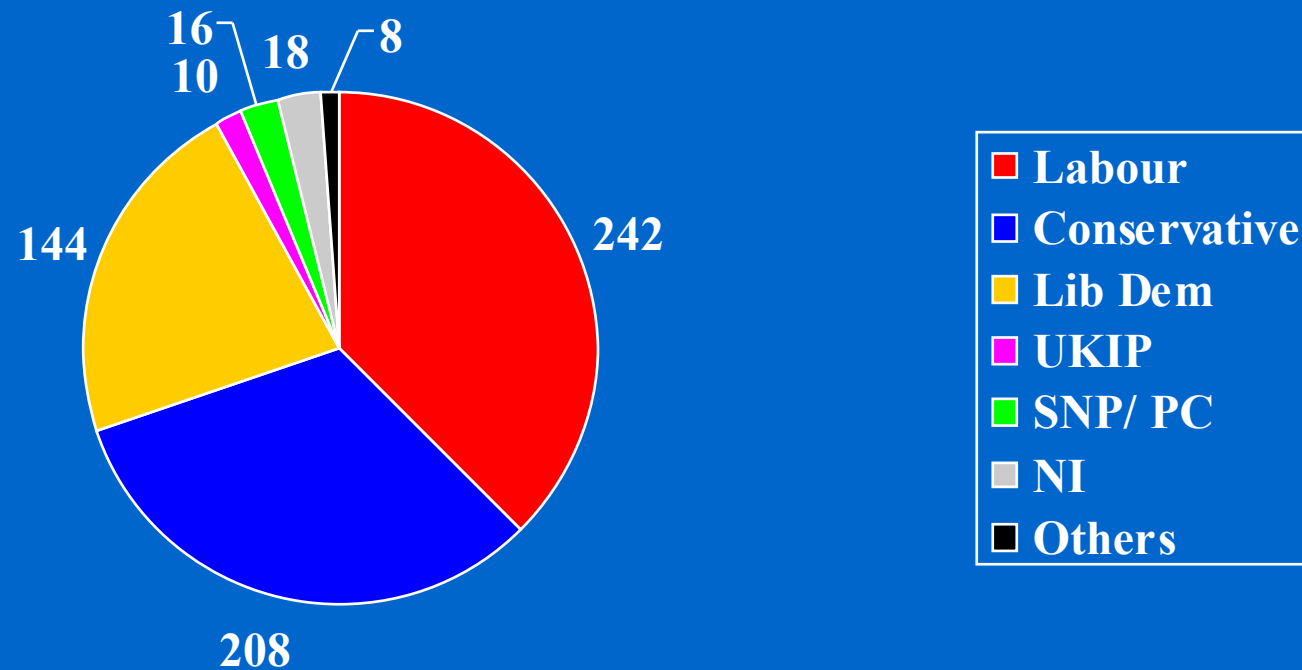
# Alternative Vote



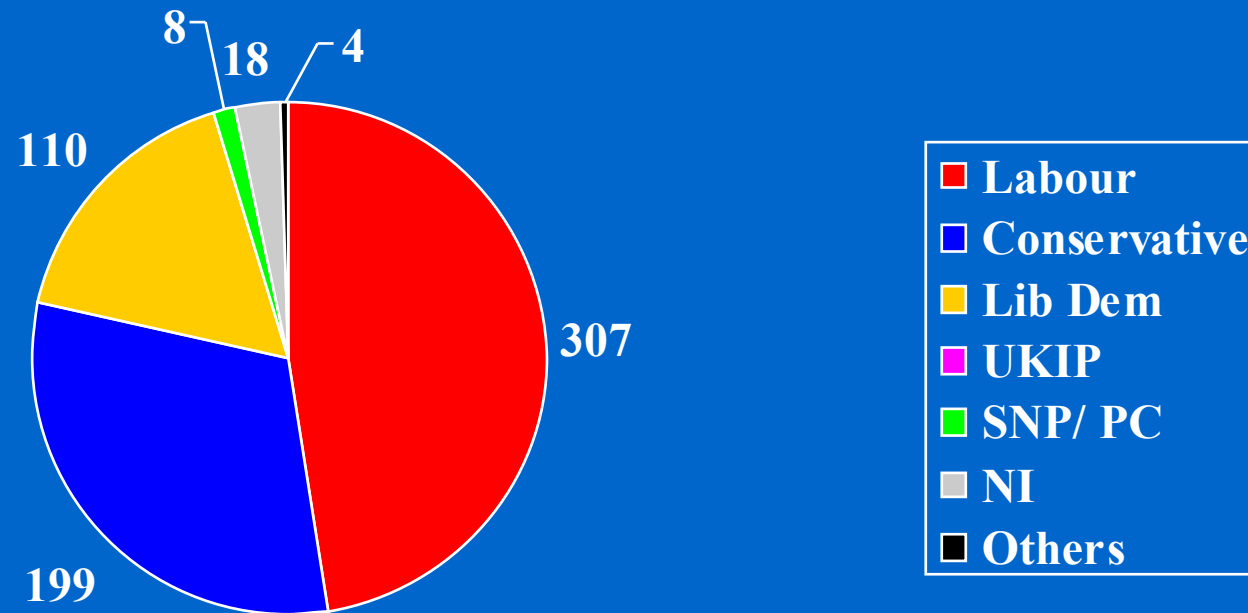
# List PR (national d'Hondt)



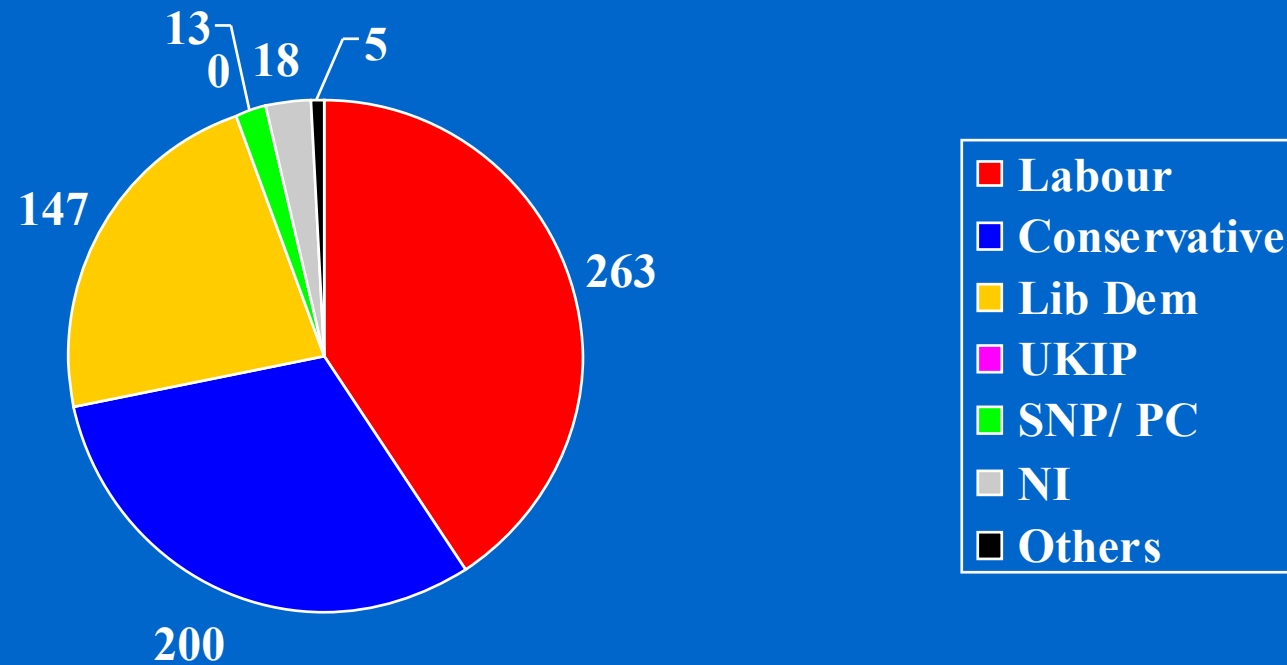
# Regional list PR/ AMS



# Alternative Vote with top up



# Single Transferable Vote



# In prospect

- The government review of new systems
- Scottish local government
- New Prime Minister
- Regional and English issues
- Increasing probability of a hung parliament, and the political context of 2009



Electoral Reform Society  
6 Chancel Street  
London SE1 0UU  
Tel: 020 7928 1622  
[ers@reform.demon.co.uk](mailto:ers@reform.demon.co.uk)  
[www.electoral-reform.org.uk](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk)

