



Gerard Batten MEP

Why UKIP Must Promote Proportional Representation



1) UKIP's electoral record - using First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)

The UK Independence Party was formed in September 1993 out of political necessity. A new political party was required to give the British people the opportunity to vote for Britain to leave the European Union. UKIP was never intended to be just a pressure group or a one-issue party. It was always intended that it would develop a full range of domestic policies and become a political party capable of winning seats in Parliament and exercising political influence; after twelve years of existence, and in that context, UKIP should now consider the case for Electoral Reform.

i) UKIP General Election Results

	Seats Contested	Votes	% of vote
1997	194	106,028	1%
2001	427	390,563	2.3%
2005	498	605,973	3%

These results are a stupendous achievement for a new political party created and maintained by volunteers with very limited funds. UKIP's record in the European Parliamentary elections is even more remarkable. In 1999 the European Union required the British government to introduce a system of Proportional Representation for European Parliamentary elections. This changed UKIP's fortunes for the better.

ii) UKIP European Parliamentary Election Results

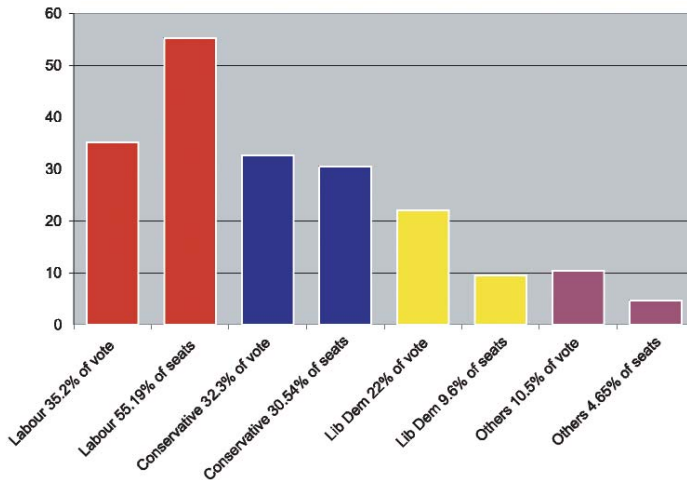
	Electoral System	Number of votes	% of vote in seats contested
1994	FPTP	155,487	3.5%
1999	PR	696,057	6.9%
2004	PR	2,650,768	16.2%

These figures demonstrate two things: the growing electoral support for UKIP and the difficulty of converting votes gained under a PR voting system into votes under the First-Past-The-Post voting system.

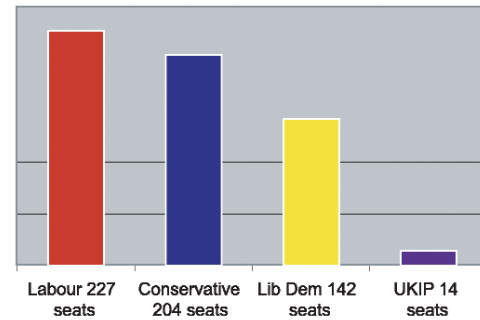
2) The General Election results May 2005

The two bar-charts below show the relation of the percentage of the vote to the number of seats won for the three main parties and how the results would have looked under a system of pure proportional representation (i.e. with no constituencies). Had some form of PR had been in place then voting patterns would have changed and UKIP might have won even more than the 14 seats shown here.

General Election Results May 2005



General Election Results Under Pure PR



UKIP is clearly the fourth largest party in the UK. The remaining 58 seats would have been distributed among eighteen minor parties.

3) Why UKIP should support Electoral Reform and Proportional Representation

In the 1920s Winston Churchill argued that, in the context of a three-party system, the electoral system was *“faulty, absurd and unfair”*. He said, *“The two-party system is the best foundation for Parliamentary institutions”* whereas the three-party system was *“unquestionably the worst”*. He went on: *“If we cannot have two parties, it would be much better to have five or six”*. Writing on the systems of Proportional Representation in use on the Continent he said *“With all the faults of the Continental systems, with all their inferiority to the old system in British government, it cannot be denied that their electoral and parliamentary machinery offers both full expression to the will of majorities and free representation of sectional opinion. Here we have neither the one nor the other”*. That is just as true now as it was then, arguably more so.

4) The arguments for and against the First-Past-The-Post electoral system

i) Arguments in favour of FPTP

- Britain has one of the oldest and strongest democratic systems in the world so why change it?
- It is easy to understand and voters can express a clear view on which party should form the next government.
- It provides a clear link between the electorate and the elected person. The system represents the views of the electorate as the candidate with the greatest support wins.
- It leads to a two-party system, with single party governments, and it tends to produce single-party governments who are strong enough to carry through legislation and tackle the country's problems.
- It prevents extremist parties gaining representation in Parliament.

ii) Arguments against FPTP

- Only one MP is elected per constituency and so the political views of the voters who did not vote for that person or party are not represented and their votes are wasted.
- MPs can be elected on less than 50% of the vote.
- The electoral system can become biased in favour of one political party. That is certainly true today. It takes far more votes to elect a Conservative candidate or a Lib-Dem candidate than it does to elect a Labour candidate.

- The system often leads to negative voting with electors voting against the party they dislike most rather than positively voting for a party or candidate.
- FPTP is best for a two-party system, but does not provide a fair voting system where there are three or more parties competing for votes.
- Governments elected on FPTP are not representative of the people. This is clearly the case in Britain after the May 2005 election where the Labour Government took power on only **35.2%** of the vote.

The conclusion must be reached that the advantages of the First-Past-The-Post system are outweighed by the arguments for a fairer voting system in today's multi-party system.

5) A brief description of the main alternative electoral systems.

i) The Alternative Vote (AV)

Like FPTP, AV is based upon single-member constituencies, and is a 'majoritarian' system. Winning candidates secure over 50% of the votes. The vote is exercised by recording preferences against the candidates on the ballot paper. If no candidate receives more than half the votes cast on the first count of first preference votes, the candidate who received the fewest first preference votes is eliminated and his or her second preference votes are distributed between the other candidates. This process continues until one candidate has achieved an overall majority. This system retains the link between the voters and the elected person. However it has the same disadvantages of FPTP in that it does not give a voice to those electors traditionally under-represented in Parliament.

ii) The Supplementary Vote (SV)

SV is similar in method and purpose to the Alternative Vote, the key difference being that under SV voters are limited to indicating a first and second preference. Where candidates receive more than a half of the first preference votes cast on the first count they are deemed elected. If not, all but the top two candidates are eliminated and their second preferences redistributed. The candidate with the greatest of the resultant vote is elected - in the majority of cases, but not necessarily, this will be with more than half of the votes cast. This is the system used to elect the Mayor of London.

iii) Single Transferable Vote (STV)

STV is essentially preferential voting (as in AV) in multi-member constituencies. Voters are able to rank as many candidates, both within parties and across different parties, as they wish in order of preference. Any of those candidates who reach a certain quota are deemed to have been elected. The surplus votes of candidates elected on the first count and the votes of those with the fewest votes after subsequent counts are distributed on the basis of preferences to the remaining candidates until sufficient candidates reach the quota and are, as a result, elected. Each constituency would elect a number of MPs, e.g. 3 or 5, depending on the number of voters. This system puts power in the hands of voters. Parliament would reflect the

views of the voters. The disadvantages are that it breaks the direct link between the voters and the representative and does not give the accuracy in proportional representation of the party list system.

iv) Party List System - Multi-member Constituencies

The rationale of the list system is to translate a party's share of the vote directly into an equivalent proportion of the seats in Parliament. The precise proportionality of such systems will, however, be influenced by such factors as whether the country is treated as a single constituency for the purposes of voting and the allocation of seats, or divided up into smaller regional constituencies; and the use of differing electoral formulae for the allocation of seats and the use of thresholds. There are many variations of the Party List System but its most basic form is the **closed party list**. It was this system that delivered 16.2% of the vote and 12 MEPs for UKIP in 2005. It is a simple system for the voter, who only has to make a single choice for a party out of the selection on offer. The main disadvantage is that it somewhat weakens the direct link between the representative and the electorate.

v) Mixed systems: Additional Member Systems (incl AV or SV Top-up) and Parallel Systems (AMS)

The title of mixed system describes any system which combines a list system element with a plurality or majoritarian single-constituency system. Under an additional member system, voters cast two distinct votes - the first for a constituency MP, and the second for a party vote. The allocation of additional members then serves to correct the disproportionality which arises from the election of single constituency MPs. Under a parallel system, the two votes are independent of each other and the additional members exist to mitigate rather than correct any disproportionality in the return of constituency members. The disadvantages are that it combines the faults of the FPTP system with the defects of the List System. It creates two classes of MP: those with constituencies, and those without constituencies.

6) Voting systems used in Britain today

A number of different electoral systems are now in use in Britain.

- **The House of Commons.** First-Past-The-Post.
- **English & Welsh Local Authorities.** First-Past-The-Post.
- **European Parliamentary Elections.** Proportional Representation, Party List.
- **London Assembly.** Additional Member System.
- **Scottish Parliament.** Additional Members System.
- **Scottish Local Authorities.** STV is to be introduced for the next elections.
- **Welsh Assembly.** Additional Member System.

The question to be asked is, 'if the Scottish and Welsh people are entitled to fairer voting systems for their Parliament and Assembly why should the British people as a whole have to tolerate the antiquated and unfair the First-Past-The-Post system?'. Many local authorities in Britain are virtual one-party dictatorships because of FPTP, which is very unhealthy for local government and democracy.

7) The experiences of other countries using PR

Most European countries use some form of PR, as do many other countries around world. These include New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, Israel, South Africa and Australia. PR is often criticised for producing weak or ineffective governments, with Italy often cited as the main example. However, Italy's political troubles may not be entirely due to its electoral system. Other countries that use a form of PR are not politically or economically weak as a result. The two most important countries that use FPTP, other than Britain, are the USA and India. The USA is strictly a two-party system, and turn-out at elections is notoriously low.

8) UKIP must support electoral reform and PR

The arguments for electoral reform are overwhelming. Why should large sections of the electorate go unrepresented in Parliament? UKIP gained 2.6 million votes in the 2004 European Parliamentary elections. We know that we have support for our policies, and that support would translate into seats in Parliament under a fairer voting system. UKIP should not allow a sentimental attachment to the past prevent us from demanding change. We have indeed had stable governments for the last thirty years: and those stable governments have transferred our democratic rights of self-determination to the European Union. We should not try to preserve a system that no longer serves its purpose.

9) How should UKIP go about promoting electoral reform?

UKIP should put its weight behind calls for electoral reform. The Labour Party Manifesto of 1997 promised a referendum on electoral reform and we should demand that they honour that pledge. **A commitment to electoral reform leading to a form of proportional representation must become a key policy of the Party.**

- UKIP MEPS and candidates should promote electoral reform whenever possible.
- UKIP members should also join the Electoral Reform Society, and the Make Votes Count society.
- UKIP should adopt Electoral Reform leading to a form of PR for Parliamentary and Local Elections as a Manifesto Policy.
- UKIP should lead a national campaign to promote PR by means of a National Petition.

10) What system of PR should UKIP support?

The various systems have advantages and disadvantages. If a referendum on electoral reform were successful then the system to be used would be decided by an Act of Parliament. Hopefully the system adopted would be the result of consultation between the Government, the political parties, the Electoral Commission, and the societies and groups concerned with electoral reform. **My preference would be for a Party List System in multi-member constituencies as this would be the fairest system and produce the greatest degree of proportionality while retaining the historic constituency system. It also retains the direct link between the electors and the MP, in that the electors can choose an MP of their political persuasion to represent them in their constituency.**

Acknowledgements & sources

- General Election & European Election results taken from; Almanac of British Politics by Robert Waller & Byron Criddle, published by Routledge; and the BBC & wikipedia websites.
- The Electoral Reform Society. 6 Chancel St, London, SE1 0UU. 020 7928 1622. www.ers@reform.co.uk
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- Winston Churchill & the British Constitution by Kevin Theakston, Politico's Publishing.

Contacts

Gerard Batten, Member of the European Parliament for London 020 7403 7174 gerard.batten@btinternet.com
Lynnda Robson, Researcher & Press Secretary: 020 7403 7174 robson.lynnda@btinternet.com
Lawrence Webb, London Regional Organiser: 020 7403 7175 lawrencejwebb@btinternet.com

PO BOX 51542, London, SE1 3XS