



# Devising an Electoral System for the 21st Century: The case for AMS

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## Introduction

The 2010 general election result has put electoral reform centre stage and dealt a potentially terminal blow to the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. This is not simply due to a perpetuation of age-old distortions which invariably reward Labour and the Conservatives and penalise the Liberal Democrats: it is also because FPTP has not delivered a decisive election result. The FPTP has ultimately been undone by one of its own proudest boasts. A hung parliament has forced the three main parties into protracted negotiations – resulting in a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition and the promise of a referendum on the Alternative Vote (AV) system.

Generally in discussions about changes to the voting system it has been assumed the choice is between three options: AV, Alternative Vote Plus (AV+) or the Single Transferable Vote (STV). However, this paper argues that it is the Additional Member System (AMS) which is most suited to the UK context. AMS combines the best elements of the current system with a rightful focus on proportionality, representation and fairness.

AMS is already used to elect the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Assembly and has been shown to work in the UK context. Internationally, in countries like Germany and New Zealand, it has demonstrated the capacity to deliver both results which reflect the electorate's voting intention and stable governance.

Most importantly in the UK context, AMS is a proportional system which retains the constituency link – an important, even cherished, part of our political tradition. AMS therefore ensures both continuity and an opportunity to embrace a system which more closely reflects the regional and national patterns of electoral support.

In arguing the case for AMS we take our lead from a number of distinguished academics and experts, and in particular from Lord Alexander of Weedon, the sole dissenting voice on the Jenkins Commission who argued that AMS represented the most appropriate electoral system for the UK (Jenkins Commission 1998).

### Structure of the paper

The paper begins with an assessment of the failings of the current FPTP system and the core arguments for genuine electoral reform. It then establishes a number of criteria which any new electoral system must satisfy. There is then an analysis of the various alternative electoral systems. Having concluded that AMS represents the most appropriate electoral system for the UK, the report explains why analysis of why AMS would be good for British political life in a wider sense.

## The First Past the Post system

The election result has delivered yet further evidence of the inadequacy of the First Past the Post system. As Table 1 demonstrates, there continue to be huge disparities between the number of votes polled and the proportion of parliamentary seats secured.

**Table 1: General Election 2010: vote share and seat numbers**

| Party            | Share of vote | Number of seats |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Conservative     | 36.1%         | 306             |
| Labour           | 29%           | 258             |
| Liberal Democrat | 23%           | 57              |
| Other            | 11.9%         | 28              |

Source: BBC Website - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/election2010/results/>

Perhaps most telling for FPTP, the share of the vote for the two major parties continues to fall (Dunleavy and Margetts 2005). In 2010, the combined Conservative and Labour vote was just 65.1 per cent, down from 67.6 per cent in 2005. By comparison, the combined share of the vote in the 1950 General Election was 89.5 per cent (BBC website, 1997). Over the last 60 years, the dominance of the two main parties has waned significantly, but we still have an electoral system which reflects a bygone era.

One of the main distorting features of FPTP is that it leads to a disproportionate focus on a small and declining number of marginal seats. Huge sums of money and resources are poured into the few constituencies that may dictate the final outcome. Early calculations from this election suggest that 89 seats were decided by less than 5 per cent of the vote and 40 of those by less than 1000 votes. The other side of this equation is that the votes of millions of people are cast in constituencies where there is little or no chance of removing the incumbent, thereby locking a large percentage of the electorate out of any sense that they have the power to choose the next government.

None of this is in any way revelatory; analysts such as Dunleavy and Margetts have long noted that the UK's electoral system has been creaking for some time. By almost any measure, the UK has been experiencing an acute democratic deficit for a number of decades. In 2005, the proportion of voters whose intentions were effectively ignored by the voting system stood at 31 per cent and there were regions of the UK in which measures of deviation from proportionality reached 86 per cent (Dunleavy and Margetts 2005). Dunleavy and Margetts have calculated that in 2005, 41 per cent of MPs had no right to hold their seats on the basis of their party's share of the vote (ibid).

During times in which FPTP regularly delivered decisive majority government, it was perhaps forgivable to overlook the inherent inequalities of that system. Now there can be no such justification. FPTP has delivered a hung parliament that has led to protracted negotiations to form a power sharing government with electoral reform central to those negotiations. The issue cannot be shelved again, even if the new government proves to be a stable one. So what form of voting system is best for Britain?

## Electoral reform – the essential criteria

In order to ensure that we emerge with electoral reform that delivers an equitable, representative and proportional system that produces stable governments, we suggest that reform must satisfy a number of clear criteria.

Firstly, it must **maintain the constituency link** via which Members of Parliament have an attachment to a locality and are perceived to represent and serve the interests of their constituents. The constituency link sits at the heart of representative democracy in the UK: it ensures a direct line of accountability between voters and their MP, and grounds MPs in a geographical reality outside the Westminster bubble. This is not to suggest that all MPs must be tied to constituencies or that the current number of constituencies must remain fixed. These will be matters for discussion.

There is a proud tradition of constituency MPs representing all constituents and not simply those who voted for them, a principle worth preserving. Early analysis of constituency results from the 2010 general election has revealed a number of examples of sitting MPs defying strong national and regional swings, often with increased majorities. In a number of instances the most obvious explanation is the presence of a popular sitting MP who has worked hard to build support locally.

Secondly, the system must **establish a clearer relationship between the number of votes cast for a particular party and the number of seats it secures**. This will help ensure that principles of representation and proportion are embedded in a reformed electoral system.

A reformed system must avoid replicating or reinforcing the distortion of the current system or simply favouring the largest parties.

Thirdly, we need a system which ensures that **all votes have a value** and that the real electoral battle is not confined to a small number of marginal constituencies.

Finally, the electoral system must be sufficiently sophisticated to provide for **stable but not glacial government**. Although any proportional system is likely to produce coalition government, it must allow voters to bring about periodic shifts in power which are decisive and reflect the changing national mood.

## The choice

After years in the doldrums, electoral reform emerged as a realistic prospect in the aftermath of the expenses scandal in 2009. Such was the scale of the political crisis that all areas of reform were being seriously discussed. Then, just prior to the election campaign, Gordon Brown announced in a speech to ippr that if Labour was re-elected it would hold a referendum on the Alternative Vote (Brown 2010). While condemned in some quarters as a 'death bed conversion' which was only made to woo Liberal Democrat supporters to the flagging Labour cause, it was a major change in Labour policy. The prospect of electoral reform then had another boost when Nick Clegg's strong showings in the early TV debates led to a surge in Liberal Democrat poll ratings. Those ratings were not translated into hard votes at the ballot box, but the actual result meant the Liberal Democrats were central to post-election negotiations.

We have of course been here before, most recently in 1997, when the first Blair government established the Jenkins Commission to examine the options for electoral reform. Reporting a year later, the Commission's authoritative report clearly stated the case for electoral reform and recommended Alternative Vote Plus (AV+) as its preferred voting system. AV+ combines the alternative vote system for the election of constituency members and a top-up of

additional seats, allocated to parties according to their share of the vote – the latter element being achieved through the use of an open or closed party list. In setting up the Commission the Blair government was delivering on a manifesto commitment to look at electoral reform. But having won a huge landslide victory under the old system it is perhaps not surprising that the Government consigned the Jenkins Report to the political shelf, largely due to internal opposition at senior levels within the Labour Party.

ippr was among those voices which consistently lamented this missed opportunity and continued to argue for a proportional system. Twelve years on from Jenkins, we argue that it is vital that another chance is not allowed to slip away.

At first glance, there are a number of different systems which could be chosen. However, closer inspection and reference to the criteria outlined above helps to narrow down the field quite considerably.

We can quickly eliminate those purely proportional systems which rely exclusively on party lists for distributing seats according to the proportion of the popular vote secured by each party. Such systems offer no opportunity to retain the constituency link and potentially concentrate too much power in the hands of party leaderships, a move which would be treated with suspicion at the best of times, but coming on the back of the parliamentary expenses scandal would be completely unthinkable.

The Alternative Vote system clearly has some virtues. The candidate who is elected must achieve at least 50 per cent support among the electorate, albeit in some cases through second preference votes, thereby giving them a greater degree of legitimacy. It therefore helps reduce the problem of wasted votes so associated with FPTP. However, despite the late conversion of Gordon Brown and Labour leadership to this system, the concession of a referendum by the Conservative leadership, and the fact that it retains the constituency link, AV is not the answer.

The core problem is that AV is not proportional; it includes no mechanism to ensure that the allocation of parliamentary seats is in proportion to the number of votes cast for each party. It simply allows for more of the voters' intentions to be taken into account in deciding the result in a single constituency. Moreover, it can produce results which are even more distorted than those under FPTP. Analysis and modelling of the 2005 general election result by the Electoral Reform Society show that AV would have increased the size of the Labour majority by 11 seats, with the Liberal Democrats gaining only a further 12 seats (Baston 2006). The Conservatives in successive elections would have lost out under AV – with the most obvious explanation for this outcome being that the Conservatives would not have secured enough second preference votes.

Simply put, AV would not remove the bias of the current system towards the largest party or parties and in some instances it would further reinforce the status quo.

Next up is Alternative Vote Plus, which combines an alternative vote for constituency members and a top-up of additional seats which are allocated to parties according to their share of the vote using either an open or closed party list. In its favour, AV+ retains the constituency link and its combination approach injects a partial degree of proportionality. However, evidence from elections which have taken place in the UK since publication of the Jenkins Report has served to undermine the report's primary recommendation. John Curtice's analysis of the 2005 general election has indicated that AV+ would have increased the Labour majority still further – on 35.3 per cent of the popular vote it would have won a majority of 104 (Curtice 2010).

Lab 377 (+21)  
Cons 171 (-27)  
Lib Dem 68 (+6)

In 1997, the impact would have been even more dramatic, swelling significantly an already huge Labour majority (ibid).

Lab 455 (+26)  
Cons 70 (-95)  
Lib Dem 115 (+69)

It is important to note that all projections of this kind are merely that – projections. They are indicative rather than conclusive – but even so they must give supporters of AV+ pause for thought. Changing to a system which could deliver even more distorted results than FPTP is surely not the answer for those looking for genuine reform.

Single Transferable Vote (STV) has the potential to be one of the most proportional electoral systems. It has been successfully used in countries such as the Republic of Ireland, where it has arguably produced stable coalitions and on a small number of occasions, majority governments.

Under STV, the electorate is asked to rank candidates in order of preference. The votes are counted using a complicated set of calculations and after the initial count the candidate with the least votes is eliminated and their second preferences are redistributed to the remaining candidates. This process continues until one of the candidates secures 50 per cent of the vote.

The central problem with STV, as the Jenkins Report noted, is that there are significant doubts as to whether it would translate well to the UK context (Jenkins Commission 1998). Its biggest drawback is that it dramatically weakens the link between the individual voter and their 'local' candidate. In order to ensure appropriate levels of proportionality, STV requires very large constituencies. For example, in the Republic of Ireland just 40 constituencies return three, four or five candidates to the 166 seat Dáil (Electoral Knowledge Network, undated). Translated to Britain, this would require even larger, 'super' constituencies. As the Jenkins report states:

*In Britain, with a population of 58.5 million as against Ireland's 3.5 million, the constituencies (unless there were to be a massive increase in the number of MPs, which the Commission regards as unacceptable; see paragraph 69) would need to be approximately four or five times as large as the Irish constituencies. This would make them geographically far-flung in rural or semi-rural areas, and, even in concentrated urban areas, constituencies of about 350,000 electors would entail a very long ballot paper and a degree of choice which might be deemed oppressive rather than liberating. (Jenkins Commission 1998)*

This effectively leaves one viable option – the system that is variously known as Additional Member System (AMS), or elsewhere in Europe, as the Mixed Member Proportional system.

AMS supplements the FPTP system for constituency elections with an additional party list. The latter is used to inject an element of proportionality, enabling a readjustment to take place which takes account of the share of the vote secured by individual parties often determined on a regional basis. In addition to supplying a list of constituency candidates, each party also supplies a further list of candidates (with its preferred candidates usually being placed at the top of the list). Depending on the variation of AMS adopted, individual candidates can appear on both lists and the allocation of list-based seats takes place once the results of the first past the post seats have been determined.

The electorate is given two votes, one to elect a constituency MP, the second to allocate to the party it wishes to see gain from the top-up process.

The Jenkins Report includes a dissenting statement from Lord Alexander of Weedon, in which he diverges from the majority view and argues for AMS with FPTP and not AV+ as the most appropriate electoral system for the UK. Lord Alexander states:

*I do not share the view of my colleagues that AV, rather than FPTP, is an appropriate way of electing constituency members.*

*This is not an arcane or technical issue primarily of interest to connoisseurs of electoral reform. Quite the contrary. The single member constituency will remain the linchpin of our electoral system, under which about 80% of members will be elected. So it is crucial that the method of election within these constituencies should be sound in principle, easy to understand and above all capable of commanding the enduring respect of the electorate. I do not consider that AV satisfies these tests.*

At the heart of Lord Alexander's argument is the need to maintain the constituency link, while ensuring that the notion of proportionality sits at the heart of the UK's electoral system.

He goes on to criticise his colleagues' support for AV+:

*AV comes into play only when a candidate fails to secure a majority of first preference votes. It does not, however, then take account of the second preferences of all voters, but only of those who have supported the least successful candidates. So it ignores the second preferences of the voters who supported the two candidates with the highest first preference votes, but allows the voters for the third or even weaker candidates to have their second votes counted so as to determine the result.*

*I find this approach wholly illogical. Why should the second preferences of those voters who favoured the two stronger candidates on the first vote be totally ignored and only those who support the lower placed and less popular candidates get a second bite of the cherry? (Jenkins Commission 1998)*

Lord Alexander's views were shared at the time by a number of leading academics specialising in electoral systems and political reform – among them Iain McLean, Professor of Politics at Oxford University, who advocated AMS in his submission to the Jenkins Commission (McLean 1998).

Analysis of the 2005 election result appears to vindicate Lord Alexander's (and Professor McLean's) position, with Baston suggesting that had AMS been used in 2005, it would have produced a more balanced and representative parliament (Baston 2006):

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Labour            | 242 |
| Conservative      | 208 |
| Liberal Democrats | 144 |
| Others            | 54  |

Further supporting evidence comes from a unique exercise which effectively re-ran part of the 1997 general election to enable researchers to test the results fully under different systems; Dunleavy *et al* concluded that:

*Only one system, the German additional member system, would have produced a proportional result, matching the parties' share of seats in Parliament to their share of the votes. (Dunleavy *et al* 1998)*

It should be noted that this experiment was based on the German model of 50 per cent constituency elections and 50 per cent top-up, which we think would be unacceptable in the

UK context. The proportions for constituency and top-up process vary, although it is usually in the region of 20–50 per cent. Jenkins originally argued that the split for the UK should be 83 per cent (constituency) to 17 per cent (top-up list). However, Dunleavy and Margetts argue that Jenkins' 83/17 ratio is insufficient due to the impact of 'the release from the constraints of the plurality system'. They conclude:

*It now seems highly unlikely that a Jenkins solution could deliver broad proportionality and that a larger proportion of top-up seats is almost certain to be required. (Dunleavy and Margetts 2005)*

Dunleavy and Margetts go on to argue that there should be a 25 per cent minimum top-up (ibid). We suggest that this should be subject to further testing before introduction and then periodic review thereafter to ensure the balance is the right one.

Like all systems which involve a top-up list, AMS offers the potential for a threshold, which requires parties to secure a minimum proportion of the vote before they can be allocated any seats via the list system. This is most frequently used to exclude extremist parties and has been used most notably in Germany.

It is proposed that if AMS were to be introduced in the UK, top-up seats should be allocated via an open list, that is one which is published and available for the electorate to see in advance of the election. Voters would be able to see exactly who they are voting for and not just leave the decision on top-up MPs to the party hierarchies. Closed lists by contrast place too much power over who sits in Parliament in the hands of those who run political parties.

It is important to acknowledge that AMS is not without its critics. As Baston notes: 'Supporters of AMS claim that it combines the best of both; its detractors say it combines the worst of both' (Baston 2006).

One of the significant criticisms of AMS and other similar systems is that the division of seats between directly elected constituency MPs and those who are allocated their seats via the list system effectively creates a two tier hierarchy. There are a number of potential concerns at play here.

Firstly, those who are elected via the top-up route do not have a direct link to individual constituencies. This puts them at a personal distance from the electorate and means they do not have the workload that constituency MPs face.

Secondly, there is a risk that candidates who have come second, third or even worse in the popular vote could gain seats as a result of their position on their parties' top-up list.

Finally, there is a risk that those who gain seats via the top-up lists may be simply party 'placemen', with an associated risk that they may be drawn from a narrow section of society and not be representative of the electorate as a whole.

These concerns could be addressed by considering the viability of simple measures such as the exclusion of constituency candidates from top-up lists, regional distribution of top-up MPs (with associated constituency responsibilities) and clear requirements regarding the representative nature of top-up lists. It is important to underline that these are minor concerns and should certainly not be used as arguments to deter reform.

## AMS – the system in place

As mentioned earlier in this report, the recent debate around electoral reform has focused on FPTP versus AV. Yet none of devolved institutions that have been set up since 1997 are elected via either system. The Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Greater London Assembly all use the Additional Member System, while the London Mayoral election uses the Supplementary Vote. These decisions appear to have been driven by the twin concerns of disproportionality and representation.

While it is likely the Government would have been aware of the Jenkins Commission's thinking when drafting the relevant legislation for Scottish and Welsh devolution, and was definitely in possession of its published view when establishing the Greater London Authority, Ministers went against its counsel and opted for AMS and Supplementary Vote for Assembly and Mayoral elections respectively.

This begs an obvious question: if AMS is appropriate for parliamentary/assembly elections in Scotland, Wales and London, why would any other electoral system be appropriate for the whole of the UK?

The arguments set out above suffice in our view to establish that there is a very strong case for replacing our current system with AMS. But to reinforce our case we argue in the next section some additional benefits for our political culture.

## Why would AMS be good for Britain?

The introduction of AMS would have a significant impact on the nature of UK political life. It would lead to a more equitable and representative political system and ensure greater accountability between the electorate and parliament. It could also help to change the culture of politics in the UK, moving it away from adversarial tribes towards a more consensual and cooperative way of doing business. We set out below the key reasons why we think AMS is the best system for the UK. These are divided into two broad categories: firstly, delivering an effective and proportional electoral system; and secondly, helping change the political culture in the UK.

### **1. Delivering an effective and proportional electoral system**

Introducing AMS would:

#### **a) Ensure a degree of continuity**

AMS clearly retains the mechanics of the current FPTP for a large percentage of parliamentary seats, while injecting proportionality into the system. It thereby maintains the direct link between most MPs and the electorate at a local level, thus safeguarding the principles of local representation and accountability.

#### **b) Be more responsive to the voting intentions of the electorate**

Unlike the pure FPTP system, AMS ensures that the voting intentions of the electorate across different parts of the country are reflected in the election result. As a consequence millions will be effectively re-enfranchised and gone would be the forced obsession with a small number of marginal constituencies.

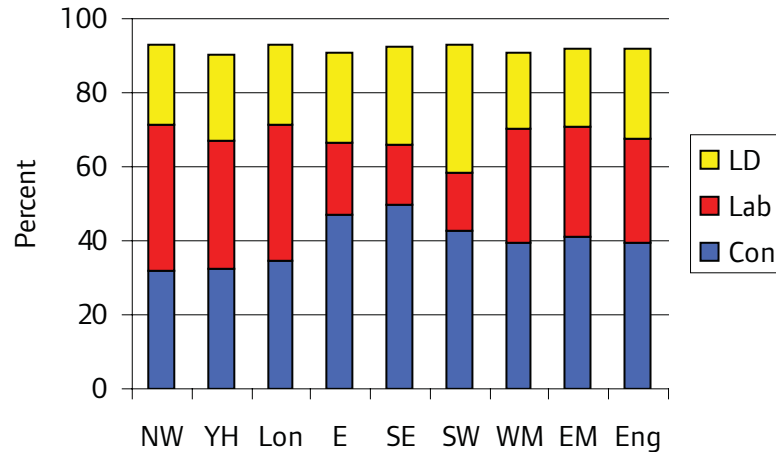
#### **c) Enable the electoral system to reflect regional and national voting patterns**

AMS would reflect the voting patterns of different parts of the United Kingdom, including both the nations and regions. The top-up seats which form a crucial part of AMS could be allocated on a regional basis, thereby increasing the degree to which the election result reflects the voting intention of those in different parts of the UK. That the UK is increasingly

divided electorally is well known, but perhaps less noted is the striking territorial differences in votes in the 2010 election in England. Furthermore, these territorial differences are grossly exaggerated by the current voting system as the graphs below show:

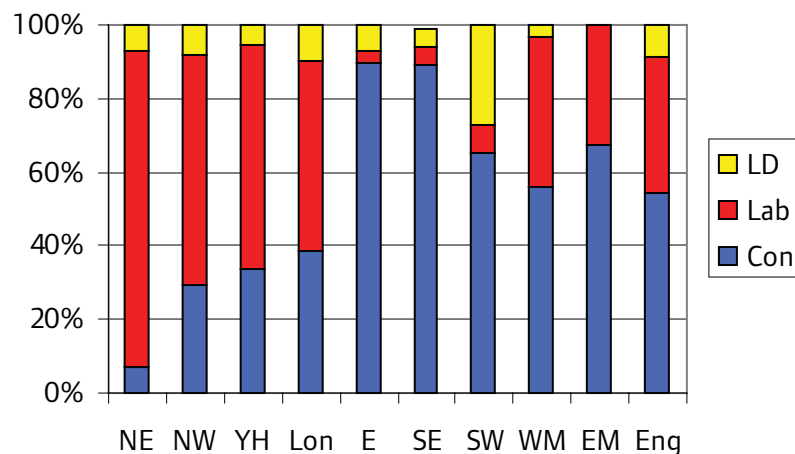
### Party share of the vote, by English region

Source: Election Unplugged II, ippr North, 2010



### Party share of seats, by English region

Source: Election Unplugged II, ippr North, 2010



## 2. Helping change the political culture in the UK

In addition to ensuring an accountable and legitimate electoral system, AMS could also:

### a) Bring renewed political legitimacy

A representative parliament comprising MPs who are there because the electorate has voted directly for them or for their party will have renewed legitimacy. They will have a mandate which is not open to age-old questions about proportionality or representativeness. This renewed legitimacy could also help bury the remaining legacy of the 'expenses scandal' and lead to a reconnection between politics and the public.

### b) Bring about a new politics

In the longer term there is the potential that AMS could result in a significant realignment of the UK political system and a change in the culture of politics. In particular, it could attract a wider range of people into politics, including those who are repelled by the current tribal and adversarial nature of party politics. Under AMS, there would be a premium on skills such as negotiation, cooperation, alliance building and making compromises to achieve consensus.

**c) End undue external influence in constituency politics**

AMS would mean that it is much less economically viable for political parties and their various benefactors such as Lord Ashcroft or the Trade Unions to target disproportionate amounts of funding to individual constituencies in the hope of tipping the result in one direction or the other. The reality is that all constituencies would remain in play and each party would have a vested self interest in campaigning for every vote.

**d) Change the role of the media in British politics**

The media would have to adapt to a significant shift in the UK's political culture. Electoral reform would end the polarisation of the two-party political system and bring about changes in the tone and style of politics. The media would have to adapt too. Indirectly, major reform of British politics may even diminish the disproportionate influence that media figures such as Rupert Murdoch currently hold. In a system which is not 'winner takes all', the *Sun* newspaper will not be able to claim that it 'won it' for any single party. A political culture of plurality, consensus and cooperation should lead to a more thoughtful and considered style of political journalism.

**e) Help keep the UK together**

It is well established that FPTP exaggerates the support of a number of political parties across the UK. This distortion is the source of considerable instability as it has created an artificial rift between 'Tory England' and 'Labour's Celtic fringe' (Lodge 2010).

The results of the 2010 election have underlined this division. In England, the Conservatives secured 297 of the 532 seats to Labour's 191. Conversely in Scotland, Labour hold 41 of the 59 seats, with the Conservatives having just a single Scottish MP and coming fourth in terms of the share of the vote. This inevitably prompts questions about the territorial legitimacy of either party to govern, as the way FPTP exaggerates party support creates the possibility of a government being formed with little support in some parts of the UK. Had the outcome of the coalition talks been different, we could currently have a minority Conservative Party government with little support in Scotland, or a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition without a majority of seats in England. The former scenario raises serious questions of territorial legitimacy, while the latter would result in cries of foul play from English MPs, as Celtic MPs voted on health and education legislation affecting only England.

We think that AMS would help to maintain the Union by ensuring that all votes were reflected in the outcome of the election – including, for example, the 16.7 per cent of the Scottish electorate that voted for the Conservative Party. The use of AMS in elections to the Scottish Parliament has ensured that the Scottish Nationalist Party cannot form a majority government on a minority of the votes cast. Instead it has had to listen to and accommodate the ideas of the other parties in the parliament. If AMS were used in general elections the even greater plurality of party support that Scotland (and Wales) see would convert into the proper level of representation of that plurality at Westminster. As Guy Lodge has written, electoral reform:

*Would transform the party political make-up of the UK, replacing 'Tory England' and the 'Celtic Labour fringe' with a much more fluid and balanced political configuration, reducing the stark differences in representation of the parties within the home nations. (Lodge 2010)*

## The political dimension

There is one further reason why AMS would be good for Britain – it represents a good compromise between the main parties' current positions on electoral reform and thus is in the spirit of the 'new politics' which is much talked about at present.

The issue has always divided the parties, both from each other and internally. That has been thrown into sharp focus by the post-election negotiations and their aftermath. On the one side we have one of the traditional 'big two' of UK politics – the Conservatives and Labour – which traditionally have benefited from FPTP and the bulk of whose memberships oppose electoral reform. On the other, we have the Liberal Democrats who historically have been penalised by the current system and continue to place electoral reform at the heart of their policy agenda.

We suggest that AMS may be a way out of solving the conundrum of electoral reform for the very reason that it is no party's preferred option. Instead, it offers an electoral system which is largely built on the foundations of FPTP (which the Conservatives and many in Labour appear keen to cling on to), while bringing in the proportionality which the Liberal Democrats so like about STV.

## Conclusion

The First Past the Post voting system is no longer fit for purpose. It is therefore vital that in considering a replacement we look at all the options and not just those favoured by the major political parties. We do not think a referendum which offers the voters a straight choice between FPTP and AV would give them the chance to vote for a truly proportional system. But for the reasons we have set out, STV has serious disadvantages in the UK context.

If electoral reform is to be meaningful and democratic, it should be based on a balance between ensuring continuity and a desire to embed the principles of proportionality, representation and fairness at the heart of the new system. The Additional Member System is the only option which satisfies these criteria.

AMS is the natural choice, politically and democratically. It provides continuity with the current electoral system through its use of the FPTP, offering familiarity and potentially comfort for those who cling to the current system, while ensuring the proportionality and representation desired by those who advocate change.

Given the new political landscape in which we find ourselves, where politicians with passionately held positions on electoral reform are having to compromise, another strong argument in AMS's favour is that it is currently politically neutral – it is no one party's preferred option. Therefore, AMS deserves to be actively considered as a viable option for electoral reform, whether on the basis of representation, proportionality or simple political considerations.

It is fitting that the final word on this issue should go to the late Lord Alexander, who perfectly articulated the case for AMS:

*I wholly support the recommendation for an additional member system. But I believe the constituency elections should be conducted under FPTP. This would involve only one change to our current electoral system. It would preserve the relationship between MPs and their constituents of all parties on the basis of a method of constituency election which is familiar. I believe that this single change would both achieve an extension of voter choice and a significant increase in*

*proportionality with the minimum disruption to our current electoral system. It could be simply and powerfully presented to the electorate as leading to fairer representation of their votes both at Westminster and in the Top-up areas. (Jenkins Commission 1998)*

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