

General Election 2010

Constitution Unit guide: How the parties' manifestos compare

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1. Electoral Reform

Labour

- MPs who are found responsible for financial misconduct will be subject to a right of recall if Parliament itself has failed to act against them.
- We will hold a referendum on introducing the Alternative Vote for elections to the House of Commons.
- Citizenship education for young people followed by a free vote in Parliament on reducing the voting age to 16, for which we will make government time available.
- We will establish a non-partisan Parliamentary Boundaries Review to examine the rules for constructing parliamentary constituencies.
- We will legislate for Fixed Term Parliaments.

Conservatives

- A Conservative government will ensure every vote will have equal value by introducing 'fair vote' reforms to equalise the size of constituency electorates, and conduct a boundary review to implement these changes within five years.
- We will swiftly implement individual voter registration, giving everyone the right to cast their vote in person and making it easier for UK citizens living overseas to vote.

Lib Dems

- Change politics and abolish safe seats by introducing a fair, more proportional voting system for MPs. Our preferred Single Transferable Vote system gives people the choice between candidates as well as parties.
- Under the new system, we will be able to reduce the number of MPs by 150. Give the right to vote from age 16.
- Make local government more accountable and responsive to local people by introducing fair votes for local elections in England.

2. Lords Reform

Labour

- The House of Lords and the new Second Chamber will be brought under the aegis of IPSA. We will ensure that the hereditary principle is removed from the House of Lords. Further democratic reform to create a fully elected Second Chamber will then be achieved in stages. At the end of the next Parliament one third of the House of Lords will be elected; a further one third of members will be elected at the general election after that. Until the final stage, the representation of all groups should be maintained in equal proportions to now.
- We will consult widely on these proposals, and on an open-list proportional representation electoral system for the Second Chamber, before putting them to the people in a referendum.

Conservatives

- We will work to build a consensus for a mainly-elected second chamber to replace the current House of Lords, recognising that an efficient and effective second chamber should play an important role in our democracy and requires both legitimacy and public confidence.

Lib Dems

- Replace the House of Lords with a fully-elected second chamber with considerably fewer members than the current House.

3. Parliamentary Reform**Labour**

- Register of Lobbyists to ensure complete transparency in their activities.
- We will ban MPs from working for generic lobbying companies and require those who want to take up paid outside appointments to seek approval from an independent body to avoid jobs that conflict with their responsibilities to the public.
- We will let the British people decide on whether to make Parliament more democratic and accountable in referenda on reform of the House of Commons and House of Lords, to be held on the same day, by October 2011.
- We will legislate for Fixed Term Parliaments.
- The public will be given a new right to petition the House of Commons to trigger debates on issues of significant public concern.
- We will take forward the proposals of the recent Speaker's Conference so that the House of Commons properly reflects the diversity of modern Britain.

Conservatives

- Reduce the number of MPs by 10 per cent.
- A Conservative government will introduce a power of 'recall' to allow electors to kick out MPs, a power that will be triggered by proven serious wrongdoing.
- We will introduce a Parliamentary Privilege Act to make clear that privilege cannot be abused by MPs to evade justice.
- Ensure that ex-Ministers are banned from lobbying government for two years after leaving office.
- Ensure that ex-Ministers have to seek advice on the business posts they take up for ten years after leaving office.
- Rewrite the Ministerial Code to make clear that any former Minister who breaks the rules on appointments will be forced to give up some or all of their Ministerial pension.
- Any petition that secures 100,000 signatures will be eligible for formal debate in Parliament. The petition with the most signatures will enable members of the public to table a Bill eligible to be voted on in Parliament.
- And we will introduce a new Public Reading Stage for Bills to give the public an opportunity to comment on proposed legislation online.
- Establishing a Backbench Business Committee to give the House of Commons more control over its own timetable.
- Allowing MPs the time to scrutinise law effectively.
- Providing more free votes, and protecting the principle that issues of conscience – like abortion – remain subject to a free vote.
- Making the use of the Royal Prerogative subject to greater democratic control so that Parliament is properly involved in all big national decisions.
- Give Select Committees the right to hold confirmation hearings for major public appointments, including the heads of quangos.
- Examine the case for giving Select Committees the power to prevent increases in quango budgets.
- We will stop the practice of 'double-jobbing', whereby elected representatives sit in both Westminster and Stormont.
- A Conservative government will introduce new rules so that legislation referring specifically to England, or to England and Wales, cannot be enacted without the consent of MPs representing constituencies of those countries.

Lib Dems

- Change politics and abolish safe seats by introducing a fair, more proportional voting system for MPs. Our preferred Single Transferable Vote system gives people the choice between candidates as well as parties.
- Under the new system, we will be able to reduce the number of MPs by 150. Introduce fixed-term parliaments.
- We will increase Parliamentary scrutiny of the budget and of government appointments and give Parliament control over its own agenda so that all bills leaving the Commons have been fully debated.
- Power to recall MPs. Require all MPs, Lords and parliamentary candidates to be resident, ordinarily resident and domiciled in Britain for tax.
- Curb the improper influence of lobbyists by introducing a statutory register of lobbyists, changing the Ministerial Code so that ministers and officials are forbidden from meeting MPs on issues where the MP is paid to lobby, requiring companies to declare how much they spend on lobbying in their annual reports, and introducing a statutory register of interests for parliamentary candidates based on the current Register of Members' Interests.

4. British Bill of Rights**Labour**

- Not interested.
- We will not repeal the Human Rights Act.

Conservatives

- We will replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights.

Lib Dems

- Not interested.
- Protect the Human Rights Act.

5. Written Constitution**Labour**

- Set up an All Party Commission to chart a course to a Written Constitution.

Conservatives

- Not interested.

Lib Dems

- Introduce a written constitution. We would give people the power to determine this constitution in a citizens' convention, subject to final approval in a referendum.
- Address the status of England within a federal Britain, through the Constitutional Convention set up to draft a written constitution for the UK as a whole.

6. Devolution and Decentralisation**Labour**

- We will give local government new powers to lead in the provision and financing of social and affordable housing, tackle climate change and work with the NHS in our new National Care Service.
- Alongside enhanced scrutiny powers for councillors, we are introducing petitioning powers for local residents to demand action, and extending neighbourhood agreements where citizens set out the standards of services they expect locally.
- City-regions will be able to gain additional powers to improve transport, skills and economic development and acquire greater borrowing flexibility.

- We will implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission, including giving the Scottish Parliament additional taxraising powers, and seek ways to build consensus behind these changes.
- In Wales, we will work with the Welsh Assembly Government on a referendum to enhance the powers to make laws affecting Wales in Wales; and to ensure that Wales is not disproportionately disadvantaged by the application of the central government funding formula.
- Supported by unprecedented public funding, we will continue to invest in the institutions of devolution, so that the Unionist and Republican traditions can work together for all the people of Northern Ireland.

Conservatives

- We will give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue if 5 per cent of the local population sign up, and they will also be able to veto any proposed high council tax increases.
- We will abolish the Government Office for London as part of our plan to devolve more power downwards to the London Boroughs and the Mayor of London.
- We support the changes proposed by the Calman Commission for clarifying the devolution settlement and creating a relationship of mutual respect between Westminster and Holyrood.
- The Prime Minister and other Ministers will go to Holyrood for questioning on a regular basis.
- The Scottish Parliament should have more responsibility for raising the money it spends. We will produce our own White Paper by May 2011 to set out how we will deal with the issues raised by Calman, and we will legislate to implement those proposals within the next Parliament.
- We will not stand in the way of the referendum on further legislative powers requested by the Welsh Assembly.

Lib Dems

- Make local government more accountable and responsive to local people by introducing fair votes for local elections in England.
- Give people a say in policing and the NHS with elected police authorities and health boards.
- Scrap the Government Offices for the Regions and regional ministers.
- Implement the Sustainable Communities Act Amendment Bill, which gives local communities the right to propose actions in their area to improve sustainability.
- Implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission to give significant new powers and responsibilities to the Scottish Parliament.
- Give the National Assembly primary legislative powers so that it becomes a true Welsh Parliament.
- We also support passing on a greater number of responsibilities to the National Assembly.
- Replace the current Barnett formula for allocating funding to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments with a new needs based formula, to be agreed by a Finance Commission of the Nations.
- Address the status of England within a federal Britain, through the Constitutional Convention set up to draft a written constitution for the UK as a whole.

7. Europe

Labour

- Fundamental reform of the EU budget remains necessary, with further changes to the Common Agricultural Policy on the way to ending export subsidies.
- On the Euro, we hold to our promise that there will be no membership of the single currency without the consent of the British people in a referendum.

Conservatives

- We will amend the 1972 European Communities Act so that any proposed future Treaty that transferred areas of power, or competences, would be subject to a referendum – a ‘referendum lock’.
- A Conservative government would never take the UK into the Euro. Our amendment to the 1972 Act will prevent any future government from doing so without a referendum.
- We will introduce a United Kingdom Sovereignty Bill to make it clear that ultimate authority stays in this country, in our Parliament.
- A Conservative government will not agree to the UK’s participation in the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor’s Office or permit its jurisdiction over the UK.
- We will change the 1972 Act so that an Act of Parliament would be required before any ‘ratchet clause’ could be used. Additionally, the use of a major ‘ratchet clause’ which amounted to the transfer of an area of power to the EU would be subject to a referendum.
- A Conservative government will negotiate for three specific guarantees – on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, on criminal justice, and on social and employment legislation – with our European partners to return powers that we believe should reside with the UK, not the EU. We seek a mandate to negotiate the return of these powers from the EU to the UK.

Lib Dems

- We believe that it is in Britain’s long-term interest to be part of the Euro. But Britain should only join when the economic conditions are right, and in the present economic situation, they are not.
- Britain should join the euro only if that decision were supported by the people of Britain in a referendum. Power to recall MEPs.

8. Direct and Deliberative Democracy

Labour Recall MPs.

- We will let the British people decide on whether to make Parliament more democratic and accountable in referenda on reform of the House of Commons and House of Lords, to be held on the same day, by October 2011.
- We will hold a referendum on introducing the Alternative Vote for elections to the House of Commons.
- The public will be given a new right to petition the House of Commons to trigger debates on issues of significant public concern.
- Alongside enhanced scrutiny powers for councillors, we are introducing petitioning powers for local residents to demand action, and extending neighbourhood agreements where citizens set out the standards of services they expect locally.
- Where new city-region authorities are created, we will give residents the opportunity to trigger a referendum for directly electing a Mayor, with Londonstyle powers.
- On the Euro, we hold to our promise that there will be no membership of the single currency without the consent of the British people in a referendum.

Conservatives

- Recall MPs.
- Any petition that secures 100,000 signatures will be eligible for formal debate in Parliament. The petition with the most signatures will enable members of the public to table a Bill eligible to be voted on in Parliament.
- And we will introduce a new Public Reading Stage for Bills to give the public an opportunity to comment on proposed legislation online.
- We will give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue if 5 per cent of the local population sign up, and they will also be able to veto any proposed high council tax increases.
- We will give the citizens in each of England’s twelve largest cities the chance of having an elected mayor.
- We will not stand in the way of the referendum on further legislative powers requested by the Welsh Assembly.
- We will stop the practice of ‘double-jobbing’, whereby elected representatives sit in both Westminster and Stormont.

Lib Dems

- We believe that it is in Britain's long-term interest to be part of the Euro. But Britain should only join when the economic conditions are right, and in the present economic situation, they are not.
- Britain should join the Euro only if that decision were supported by the people of Britain in a referendum.
- Introduce a written constitution. We would give people the power to determine this constitution in a citizens' convention, subject to final approval in a referendum.
- Power to recall MPs.
- Give people a say in policing and the NHS with elected police authorities and health boards.

9. Civil Liberties**Labour**

- Promise not to repeal the Human Rights Act.
- To encourage freedom of speech and access to information, we will bring forward new legislation on libel to protect the right of defendants to speak freely.

Conservatives

- We will review and reform libel laws to protect freedom of speech, reduce costs and discourage libel tourism.

Lib Dems

- Introduce a Freedom Bill.
- We will regulate CCTV, stop councils from spying on people, stop unfair extradition to the US, defend trial by jury, and stop children being fingerprinted at school without their parents' permission.
- Restore the right to protest by reforming the Public Order Act to safeguard non-violent protest even if it offends; and restrict the scope of injunctions issued by vested interests.
- Protect free speech, investigative journalism and academic peer reviewed publishing through reform of the English and Welsh libel laws – including by requiring corporations to show damage and prove malice or recklessness, and by providing a robust responsible journalism defence.
- Scrap intrusive Identity Cards and have more police instead, and also scrap plans for expensive, unnecessary new passports with additional biometric data.
- End plans to store your email and internet records without good cause.
- Remove innocent people from the police DNA database and stop storing DNA from innocent people and children in the future, too.
- Ensure that everyone has the same protections under the law by protecting the Human Rights Act. Scrap control orders, which can use secret evidence to place people under house arrest.
- Reduce the maximum period of pre-charge detention to 14 days.