

## Defeat of Alternative Voting System in the national referendum held on May 5, a big Labour recovery, and heavy Liberal Democrat losses throughout the UK

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United Kingdom Alternative Vote referendum, 2011		
Yes or no	Votes	Percentage
<b>X No</b>	<b>13,013,123</b>	<b>67.9%</b>
Yes	6,152,607	32.1%
<b>Total votes</b>		<b>0%</b>
Voter turnout		41.97%
Electorate		45,684,501

The election results after May 5 national referendum on changing the historic British “first past the post” system showed a resounding defeat for those trying to change the current first past the post system. The British electorate spoke and clearly rejected the AV system in every region of the United Kingdom. The **No** vote obtained 67.9% of the total vote, while the **Yes** votes gained only 32.1% of the total votes, a huge defeat. The No vote swept the board throughout the UK, and won in every region.

The proposed referendum to reform the voting system was Liberal Democrat policy and strongly favoured by Lib Dem Leader and British Coalition Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, and the referendum had been agreed by the Conservative Party and its Leader David Cameron as part of the price for the Coalition government being formed a year ago in May 2010. However, David Cameron and the Conservatives have always been firmly in the No camp, David Cameron and leading Conservative Coalition Ministers strongly campaigned for a No vote, and they were very pleased by the defeat of the Yes vote. The Labour leader Ed Miliband and many of his top supporters strongly favoured a Yes vote to changing the British voting system, as they believed it could help to shake up the British political system, and spell the end to political tribalism, and would return Labour to government again at the head of a moderate centre left leaning coalition. However, the Labour Party was split on this issue, as over half the Parliamentary Labour Party, and many senior former ministers in the Brown and Blair governments were against the proposed voting reform, as were several big unions, and the leftish Labour Representation Committee (LRC). Most Labour Party members and voters were not in favour of changing the current voting system, as they believed that the current first past the voting system could see the return of a Labour Government in the future with an overall majority. They also believed that the AV system would mean permanent coalition governments, and deals behind closed doors by parties, without the voters being properly consulted.

The May 5 elections saw a resurgence and recovery in the fortunes of the Labour Party in both England council elections, and election to the Welsh Assembly. Labour obtained a higher percentage of the vote with 37% of the vote compared with the Conservative total vote of 35%. The Liberal Democrats were heavily defeated in the English council election and lost over half their council seats. The Liberal Democrats also did very badly in the elections for members of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, and in the elections for the Welsh Assembly. The Conservative Party did better than the Liberal Democrats in the council elections in England and held a steady position.

The Liberal Democrats took a severe drubbing at the hands of voters throughout Britain. This was due to their broken promises over public spending cuts, participation in a right wing Coalition Government dominated by the Conservatives, and the increased university student fees Nick Clegg became a hate figure. The Liberal Democrats lost 748 councillors, Labour gained 857 councillors, and the Conservatives gained an extra 86 councillors.

The election night was a good one for Labour which showed a very strong recovery, a moderately satisfactory result for the Conservative Party who maintained their previous gains from local council elections, while the Liberal Democrats suffered a catastrophic meltdown and loss of voter support, and defeat of many of their councillors. Before the right leaning Coalition Government dominated by the Conservatives was formed in May 2010 the Liberal Democrats were viewed as a centre left party, then they moved to the right suddenly, which led to strong loss of support among both Lib Dem voters and grassroots activists.

The nationalist pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) did very well in the elections to the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Labour suffered its worst defeat at the polls in 80 years in its former industrial heartland constituencies in Scotland. The Leader of the Scottish Labour Party Iain Gray immediately resigned when the scale of the Labour defeat in Scotland became clear. However, most of the voters who supported SNP did not vote in favour of Scottish independence, but more because they liked the charismatic SNP Leader Alex Salmond, and they were disillusioned by the Labour Party. Labour retained 37 seats, and lost 7, its worst performance in Scotland for 80 years. The SNP saw a strong upsurge in voter support and gained 23 seats, and with 69 seats in the Scottish Parliament should be able to form a comfortable government majority without the need for a coalition. The Liberal Democrats experienced severe losses as the cost of being in the coalition government at Westminster with the Conservatives, and they lost 12 seats and were reduced to only 5 seats in the new Scottish Parliament. The Conservative Party won 15 seats, but lost 5 seats. Their performance was better than the Liberal Democrats. However, the combined votes of the pro-unionist parties Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrats exceeded the SNP vote.

In Wales Labour had a good result and pushed the nationalist Plaid Cymru into third place; Labour nearly gained an overall majority of seats in the Welsh Assembly at Cardiff. Labour elected 30 Welsh Assembly Members, a 4-seat gain. The Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru) did very badly and reduced to only 11 seats, they lost 4 Assembly Members, and were pushed into third place behind the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party did well in Wales and made modest gains of 2 seats to the Welsh Assembly, and became the second largest party in the Assembly with 14 members. The Liberal Democrats did badly and lost 1 seat, and now have only 5 Assembly members.

<b>United Kingdom local elections, 5 May 2011</b>			
279 councils in England, plus all 26 councils in Northern Ireland			
<b>Party</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>
<b>Leader since</b>	6 December 2005	25 September 2010	18 December 2007
<b>Last election</b>	35% <sup>[1]</sup>	27% <sup>[1]</sup>	26% <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Popular vote</b>	38% <sup>[2]</sup>	36% <sup>[2]</sup>	15% <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Swing</b>	▲3% <sup>[3]</sup>	▲10% <sup>[3]</sup>	▼9% <sup>[3]</sup>
<b>Councils</b>	157 <sup>[1]</sup>	57	10 <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Councils +/-</b>	▲4 <sup>[1]</sup>	▲26 <sup>[1]</sup>	▼9 <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Councillors</b>	5,109 <sup>[1]</sup>	2,459 <sup>[1]</sup>	1,098 <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Councillors +/-</b>	▲86 <sup>[1]</sup>	▲857 <sup>[1]</sup>	▼748 <sup>[1]</sup>

In Northern Ireland where politics is still influenced by different factors from the rest of the UK, where religion is still an important factor in deciding elections, the two main power-sharing parties the mainly protestant Democratic Unionist Party(DUP), and the mainly catholic Sinn Fein emerged again as the two largest parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Both parties are strongly committed to power-sharing.

The May 5 elections showed a very heavy defeat for the **Yes Campaign** who wanted Britain to adopt a fairer Alternative Voting System (AV) in the national referendum throughout the country, and a huge win for the **No Campaign**; the issue of reform of the electoral system will be put on the back burner for a long time. Labour showed a strong recovery and comeback in both England and Wales, but experienced a historic defeat in Scotland, which it will have to work hard to reverse. The Lib Dems experienced a huge defeat throughout the United Kingdom a collapse of their vote, and they lost over half their council seats in England. Labour can be quietly satisfied with the overall election result, but they must avoid complacency, learn from the election successes in England and Wales, the big setback in Scotland, and build upon them to achieve a Labour victory at the next British General Election.