

#Labour4PR

**Everything you
need to know
about electoral
reform.**





Labour and electoral reform

Labour's position

There is strong consensus across the Labour movement in favour of introducing Proportional Representation (PR) for general elections.

- Labour's official party programme states that "the flaws in the current voting system are contributing to the distrust and alienation we see in politics".
- More than 400 Constituency Labour Party (CLP) motions have been passed in favour of PR – over 60% of all CLPs.
- Wherever a motion for electoral reform has been debated, more than 96% of CLPs have decided to vote in favour.
- More than two thirds of Labour's affiliated trade unions have policy in favour of PR:



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- The 2022 Labour Party conference voted in favour of implementing PR by an overwhelming majority (*pictured above*).

The Tories are only too happy with the broken status quo. It falls to Labour in government to tackle the distrust and alienation caused by First Past the Post.

Why First Past the Post (FPTP) causes distrust and alienation

Unrepresentative governments

- FPTP means the Parliament and government we get does not reflect how people vote.
- In 2019 the Tories got less than 44% of the vote but 56% of the seats. In 2015 they got 37% vote but a majority of seats.

Ignored voters

- In most recent general elections, a majority of voters ended up with an MP they didn't vote for.
- Millions of voters get an MP who doesn't share, reflect or agree with their views and priorities.

Safe seats & electoral deserts

- As most seats are "safe", most of the time, parties focus their campaigning and policies on just a handful of marginal seats, neglecting most areas.
- Over time this neglect erodes trust and support, builds up grievances and can lead to support for more extreme politics.
- It also demoralises Labour activists across huge areas of the country where there is little incentive to campaign locally.

What the evidence says

- Countries with PR consistently have higher public satisfaction with democracy than those with winner-takes-all systems like FPTP.
- Every developed country with a FPTP-type system has seen plummeting public faith in democracy over recent decades. Every comparable country with high and rising satisfaction with democracy uses PR.

**"Millions of people vote in safe seats and they feel their voice doesn't count. That's got to be addressed by electoral reform."
KEIR STARMER MP**

Proportional Representation (PR) – and how it would help

PR is any system in which seats broadly match votes and all votes count equally.

This solves the problems with FPTP...

- ✓ Parliament is representative of the people because it fairly reflects how they vote – and parties cannot govern on a minority of the vote.
- ✓ The vast majority are represented by an MP who they voted for.
- ✓ Votes count everywhere, not just in ‘marginal’ seats: no voter or area can be ignored.
- ✓ Distrust and alienation reduces because people know they have a real say in our politics.

PR is equality at the ballot box. Labour supports equality in every other area – from human rights, in the workplace and access to public services – it’s time it became the party of equal votes.



Did you know?

- PR is ‘normal’ for democracies: used in some form by 85% of OECD countries.
- The only other country in Europe to use First Past the Post for general elections is Belarus.
- PR systems which keep a local constituency link are already used in the UK – including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – as well as countries like New Zealand, Germany and Ireland.
- Because every vote counts, turnout in an election held under PR is on average 5–8% higher than the same election held under FPTP.

FPTP advantages the Tories... PR would end this right wing bias

First Past the Post has a proven conservative bias wherever it's used:

- on average, countries with FPTP have parliaments which are more right-wing than their voters.
- countries with FPTP tend to have right-wing governments for about two-thirds of the time.

Because PR has no bias in either direction, countries that use it have centre left-leaning governments much more often.

The UK matches this: in 19 of the last 20 general elections most people voted for parties to the left of the Conservatives yet the Tories have been in power for two-thirds of that time.

The impact of this right wing bias is confirmed by New Zealand's experience before and after electoral reform. From WWII until 1996, under FPTP, NZ Labour was in government less than a third of the time. Since PR was introduced, NZ Labour has governed just over half the time.

Why does FPTP have a right-wing bias?



by **Professor Maria Iacovou**,
University of
Cambridge

In industrialised nations all over the world, progressive voters tend to live in urban areas.

Under FPTP, this produces safe seats won by huge margins – with tens of thousands of votes piling up without producing any more representation.

As a result, Labour overwhelmingly holds the seats in the UK that are won by the biggest majority. For example, Labour won the ten 'safest' seats at each of the last three general elections. Sometimes we've won as many as 34 of the 35 safest seats. Yet the enormous number of votes in these constituencies do not increase Labour's parliamentary seats – and are effectively wasted.

On the other hand, support for centre-right parties tends to be more evenly spread across rural and suburban areas. Under FPTP this is far more efficient. That's why the Conservatives in the UK usually end up needing fewer votes to win each seat.

PR addresses this by making all votes count equally, wherever they are cast.



PR creates better outcomes for voters, workers and society

It's no accident that all the most egalitarian countries achieved what they have through governments elected by PR, not FPTP.

Academic research has found PR leads to better outcomes including on:

- Income inequality
- Social spending
- Trade union strength & legislation
- Climate action
- Poverty
- Economic democracy
- Environmental protection

The point is not that PR will automatically deliver good outcomes in these areas – but that FPTP is a barrier to progress on all of them.

Case study: how PR has unlocked workers' rights in New Zealand

by **Professor Rob Ford**



The Kiwis switched their electoral system from FPTP to a proportional system in 1996. Academics have found that, since then, the left has governed more often and achieved more income redistribution and more generous welfare policies than in the decades before electoral reform.

PR not only shifted the balance of power leftwards, but also emboldened New Zealand Labour to be more pro-union. NZ's last governments under FPTP – like the last UK Labour government – never repealed the punitive trade union laws that they

inherited. After electoral reform, there was a dramatic rise in the number of positive mentions of trade unions and workers' rights in Labour manifestos and in 1999 a Labour government repealed the trade union legislation imposed by NZ's conservatives under FPTP. Since 2000, NZ Labour has introduced legislation on paid parental leave, equal employment opportunities, rest breaks and breastfeeding and flexible working relations.

The main party of the New Zealand right – the National Party – is still a potent force, and has governed nearly half of the time under PR (down from three quarters of the time pre-reform). Yet when the National Party has governed, they have never governed with a majority under PR. The need to keep more moderate parties and their voters onside has acted as a check on the New Zealand right, making them more reluctant to roll progressive reforms back.

“When I had to stand on the doorstep for over a year saying to people ‘your vote here in Putney matters more than most in the country’, because it was such a marginal seat. That didn’t seem very fair to me. One reason I joined the Labour Party is that sense of fairness and equality. The fact that not everyone’s vote is equal really feels dishonest to me.”
FLEUR ANDERSON MP



How to get involved

Sign up to Labour for a New Democracy (L4ND) for key updates and invitations from the #Labour4PR movement.

www.l4nd.org.uk



Join Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER) to contribute to the #Labour4PR campaign and be part of Labour’s official democratic reform organisation.

www.lcer.org.uk



“Electoral reform is important because politics isn’t just about your side winning, it’s about what you want your side to do when you’re in power and it’s about trying to build a politics that works for everybody in the country.”

JONATHAN REYNOLDS MP

Labour knows FPTP is bust

The party's policy programme formally recognises that FPTP is driving distrust and alienation. Now, we need to address this in government to restore trust in politics.

The public knows FPTP is bust

Opinion polls consistently show support for PR far outstripping support for the status quo – and this support is rising.

The long running British Social Attitudes survey found an outright majority want PR.

Labour's target voters want PR more than any other reform

Polling by Labour Together shows that our core target voters – including 'Workington man' and 'Stevenage woman' – think PR would be a bigger improvement to British democracy than any other democratic reform.

PR is the new way of governing – we need to end sticking plaster politics

We all came into politics because we care about issues like making the NHS fit for the future, breaking down barriers to opportunity, and tackling climate change – not voting systems.

But for as long as we risk getting unrepresentative Tory governments on a minority of the vote, the changes we make in government can easily be swept away.

PR will change British politics, put power in the hands of communities, and prevent an out of touch minority from wrecking our economy and public services again.

