

The Snap Election Plan



Martin Bristow

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Preface

At 07:00 on 23rd June 2016, I walked into my local polling station and voted in the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. As I walked home, a sense of gratitude consumed me. I thought of my freedoms and rights, and of my British grandfather who had risked his life in World War II for his country. Just under 20 hours after walking home from the polling station, at 03:00 on 24th June 2016, my phone alarm sounded.

I crept downstairs, excitedly turned on the television, and was surprised to see the latest vote count of 52:48 in favour of leaving the EU. I wasn't initially concerned: the results so far weren't a good representation of the whole, I thought. As the morning progressed, the results remained more or less consistent. I couldn't believe what was happening. Initially, my dominant emotion was that of excitement: democracy was writing history in the country that I called home. Then, as the magnitude of the event dawned on me, devastation took hold: how could we turn our backs on a project of freedom, peace, prosperity, unity, collaboration, and diversity? How could we turn our backs on a project that had emerged from the ashes of World War II, and one that had aimed to bring stability to Europe? The EU had its faults, but how could we possibly justify this decision, to ourselves and to future generations, I asked myself.

As the morning wore on, and the outcome became increasingly certain (the figures settled on 52:48 to Leave, 72 % turnout), my mind was racing. How would this affect the lives of future generations, European peace, world peace, opportunities, Britons' identity, the UK's immediate and long-term economy? How would this affect the stability of the union between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? Amongst these questions, I tried to take what positives I could from the result. I thought whether Britons might pull together more as a result of their new identity.

The consensus, just before the vote took place, was that the result would be for the UK to remain a member of the EU, a membership that it had held since 1973 (then of the European Economic Community). And now, over 40 years later, I found myself grappling with the concept that my wish to remain in the EU had been a minority one.

After I had got over the shock, my hope was that the UK would unite in its belief in democracy, in unity, in mutual respect, and in tolerance. I hoped that we would pull together and make the best of leaving the EU according to the expectation, just prior to the referendum, of what a Leave result would mean. I turned to news and social media in an attempt to ground myself, to make some sense of what was happening.

My feeling of hope soon turned to frustration: news and social media were filled with comments and opinions that seemingly showed no respect for the UK's democracy. I could understand the level of shock, disbelief, and even horror, that people were feeling—I had similar feelings myself. But what shook me was how all those emotions were being channelled. What I was reading was all manner of attempts to justify annulling or diluting the result. A petition to re-run the referendum, on the basis that the turnout and majority were insufficient, was racking up votes by the second. There were also reports of Leave voters disowning their decision, and wishing to be given another chance to vote. Other Leave voters claimed that they had actually wanted to remain in the EU, and had only voted Leave to narrow what they thought would be a comfortable win for Remain. It seemed that, whatever reason people could find to disrespect, dilute, or annul the result, they would find it.

I started to think for myself what the reasons were, why the UK had voted to leave. When I looked beyond the complaints of lying politicians, of David Cameron's supposed mistake, and of a poor Remain campaign, what I started to believe was this: the UK electorate voted to leave the EU because, for decades, they had been starved of being able to shape their own country. They had become increasingly disillusioned, disengaged, and disenfranchised with the very institutions that were supposed to serve them.

Although people voted to leave the EU for a whole host of reasons, the following two reasons, in my opinion, decided the EU referendum result:

- Many voted to leave because they were frustrated with politics generally, and saw the EU referendum as a means to bring about meaningful change, the last chance that they might have to do this for decades to come.
- Many voted to leave because they thought that leaving the EU would solve problems that had, in actual fact, very little, if nothing, to do with the EU.

Unfortunately, the media played a big role in Brexit. Much of the media was owned by wealthy corporations and individuals who benefited from the existing constitutional arrangements in the UK. Whenever the UK faced issues, much of the media was all too keen to use the EU as a scapegoat. But to ask wealthy corporations and individuals to want to be, well, less wealthy, would be to start breaking up the foundations of capitalism, with all the good that it brings.

The cause of this disillusionment, disengagement, and disenfranchisement in politics wasn't the fault of individual politicians either: they, too, had been suffering. After all, who wanted to be disliked, disrespected, and unappreciated? Who wanted to be put under prolonged intense pressure, to be sent hate mail and publicly disrespected? Who wanted to go into a profession to stand up for what one believed in, but have to compromise on it, every day, to continue to earn a living? Who wanted to have to fight internal party battles? Who wanted to have to join a party that didn't really stand for one's views, simply because it was the only way to make any real progress? Who wanted to govern but with little mandate? Unfortunately, the vast majority of those politicians who filled influential roles were the ones who, very early in their political careers, learned to accept the status quo. To do good in a malfunctioning environment was better than to do no good at all.

Of course, there were *some* politicians who, even behind closed doors, wouldn't have agreed with the failings of the system that I've described in this book. But, in my view, this is only because, ever since they were old enough to know what politics was, they had internalised the system that they were presented with.

If the electorate were starved of being able to shape their own country, and if wealthy corporations, wealthy individuals, and individual politicians weren't responsible, what *was* the cause? As I see it now, it all boiled down to one thing: how the nation's views were translated into positions of power in the most powerful legislature in the UK. I refer to the voting system that is used to elect members to the House of Commons, and the system goes by the name of 'first past the post' (FPTP).

FPTP favours the UK's biggest two political parties: Conservative and Unionist, and Labour. FPTP's winner-takes-all approach means that, within each constituency, all the losing candidates' efforts count for nothing. When aggregated across the

country, this amounts to a huge waste. Millions of votes are therefore cast, not to maximise a positive result, but to minimise a negative one, in trying to avoid ending up on this waste heap. The result of this tactical voting is that the two dominant parties have an unfair advantage, in that, between them, they win far more seats than they have support for. For the last ten general elections, and not even taking account of tactical voting, the mean percentage increase from vote share to seat share is 37 %.

Under FPTP, all votes cast for candidates that didn't win, and all votes cast in excess of what the winner needed to win, are wasted. That is, if those voters hadn't voted that day, it would have made no difference to the allocation of seats in the House of Commons. At the 2017 general election, 68.4 % of all valid votes cast were wasted in this way. At the 2015 general election, the figure was 74.3 %.

I firmly believe that, over the decades, if the UK's views had been represented more proportionally in parliament, the UK wouldn't have voted in 2016 to leave the EU. Instead, over the decades, there would have been a gradual and visible increase in support for leaving the EU. Britons would have been much more engaged in politics, current affairs, democracy, economics etc., because they would have been empowered to shape their own futures. The whole culture and ethos around politics would have been more positive, collaborative, direct, open, honest, and progressive. The media and individual politicians would have wielded less power simply because the electorate would have wielded more. All this would have resulted in much more debate, debate that wouldn't have been grounded in rhetoric, falsehoods, and melodrama, but in pragmatism, facts, and realities.

In addition to this increased engagement, empowerment, and enfranchisement of the electorate, there would have been less internal pressure within political parties. If there had been a divergence in a party, the party would have had far more to gain by splitting into two parties, or by encouraging dissenting individuals to join a party that did represent their views. The Conservative party would likely have been a pro-EU party, unified, and with a clear vision. UKIP would have been the party of choice for Eurosceptics, and would have grown to a size much more in keeping with public opinion. The Conservative party would have been under no pressure to use a referendum to solve internal party problems, as it attempted to do in 2015/2016.

There would also have been more trust in the UK's political and democratic institutions, and those people who represented them. Over the decades, people wouldn't have lost trust in politicians, economists etc., to lead them, in a similar way that they wouldn't have lost trust in a doctor to heal them or a teacher to teach them.

Of course, these are all generalisations. But the result of the referendum on 23rd June 2016 *was* a generalisation; it was the balanced view of the UK at the time. So, although the result of the EU referendum could be attributed to all manner of reasons, I do believe that the UK's system for electing representatives to the House of Commons was the underlying reason the UK voted to leave the EU.

Despite this flaw in the UK's democracy, one institution that was still serving the UK's democracy well on 23rd June 2016 was the most fundamental and direct tools of democracy: the binary referendum. One simple question and two simple answers, to make a decision on a national level. So, on that fateful day, when the UK government asked its people, its clients, its customers, what they wanted it to do, I had hoped that the institution of the referendum would be honoured and respected by all. To the contrary, and to my dismay, it was undermined. Just as it is unfair to blame a postal worker for delivering a hefty bill, it is unfair to blame the institution of the referendum for Brexit. Personally, I hope that the referendum and what has followed will be the lens that will bring into focus what the UK desperately needs: reform of its general-election voting system.

My frustration at what I was reading in the news and social media on 24th and 25th June urged me to action, and I took to Facebook to share my views. My first post was on Saturday 25th June 2016, which read as follows:

Thank you to all those who exercised their democratic right on Thursday and voted. I voted _____ [removed for legal reasons] and respect the result to Leave. The binary vote was democracy at its purest, simple and to the point. Sadly it seems there are very few chances for the people of the U.K. to have a direct influence in this way. Our far-from-perfect first-past-the-post voting system comes nowhere close; 16 % [sic] of votes resulting in 1 UKIP MP*

anyone? And who knows what 16 % [sic] would have been were it not for the reality of a “wasted vote”. Had those voices been heard sooner, I suspect Thursday's result may have been different. Democracy got off the sofa on Thursday, went outside into the sunshine, and stretched its legs. Let's now pull together to achieve what the majority of us want.

*The UKIP vote share was actually 12.6 %; I think I was quoting the combined vote share of UKIP and the Green party, which was 16 % rounded to the nearest integer. If we inflate the 12.6 % by, say, 20 %, because of those who would have voted for UKIP had they not been put off by the prospect of wasting their vote, then UKIP's vote share would have been 15 %. 15 % of the seats in the House of Commons is 97 seats, nothing close to the one seat that they were awarded.

Since this first post, I have posted several more times, and I have included all my Facebook posts since the referendum in the appendix at the back of this book.

It was February 2017. I had been following the news since the referendum, and I was still just as passionate about the state of UK politics and democracy. I had also spent time since the referendum writing Facebook posts on the subject. This led me to the decision of using this interest and material as a starting point for writing a book on Brexit, politics, and democracy. I played around with different titles and ideas, and whether the book should be fiction or non-fiction. Non-fiction suited me better and, on 19th March 2017, I settled—or so I thought—on the simple title of ‘My Thoughts on Brexit’. After setting to work, I quickly realised that the title was bland, so I changed it to ‘Brexit Means Leave’, a play on ‘Brexit means Brexit’. This evolved again a few days later. I thought that the working title could be confusing, so I changed it to ‘Democracy First’. All my notes up to that point indicated that the book was, ultimately, all about democracy, and about putting that above all else. So it seemed like the natural title.

I had always seen the book as being a basis of discussion and debate, but not directly leading to anything more. But why not take it one step further, I thought. If democracy was central to the book, and if the UK's general election voting system was central to the UK's democracy, why not write the book to do more than just stimulate debate? Why not set out how the UK might go about

reforming the UK general election voting system? At that point, in the morning of 22nd March 2017, I decided to do just that. What I needed was a plan.

I had long been aware of the FPTP cycle that went like this: those in government (and those in the official opposition) benefited from the voting system that gave them that power, and so were unlikely to want to change the system; but the system could only be changed by those who were *in* power. This was an obvious barrier to bringing about voting reform. Could enough members of parliament (MPs) be persuaded to support it, so that the necessary legislation could be pushed through parliament, I asked myself. This was a possibility. Another option was to persuade all the smaller parties to demand voting reform as a pre-requisite for any government deal following a hung parliament, then try to take as many seats away from the big two parties as possible to bring about a hung parliament. But both these options didn't appeal to me. I knew that I would need public support to make any plan work. Unfortunately, with the level of trust that the public had in established politicians and parties, I saw this as an uphill struggle. What I wanted was a plan that would put matters entirely in the hands of the UK electorate.

What I quickly realised was that the power of the vote, not that of the pound, would be central to the plan, and therefore so would be the next general election. I considered founding a political party that stood for voting reform that the public would be able to vote for. But there were already several voting-reform-supporting parties out there, so why would voters vote for the new one, I asked myself. The new party would have the advantage of being fresh on the scene, from which it could build trust with the electorate, but how would that be sufficient to convince enough voters to vote for the party? To stand out from the crowd further, I could have the party stand *only* for voting reform. This would eliminate the possibility of voters being put off by other policies that they might not agree with. But if I took this approach, why would voters vote for a party that would, for up to five years until the next general election, only put in place voting-system legislation? Also, I would face the same challenges that all the other smaller parties faced, in that many voters would be put off voting for it because of the risk that their vote would go to waste. The system was against me—I thought on.

What seemed central to breaking into the FPTP cycle was this: how could I minimise the risk to voters of their vote for a voting-reform-supporting party going to waste? I identified three questions:

- How could I maximise the chance that, in any given constituency, a vote for this new party would result in the party's candidate becoming an MP?
- How could I maximise the chance that, if a voter *did* vote for the candidate of this new party, and the candidate *did* win the seat, the resulting MP would be able to assist in bringing about voting reform?
- How could I maximise the chance that, even if the MP *did* assist in bringing about voting reform, once the MP had done that, they would continue to provide value to the voter for the rest of the parliamentary term?

The ideas for all these questions came to me in quick succession and, in the afternoon of 22nd March 2017, *The Snap Election Plan* was born.

The following day, I started to flesh out the details of the plan, but I quickly realised that the book would take longer to write than I had first thought. I had no intention to rush the book, but at the same time I was eager to get a book published. To meet these needs, I put the 'The Snap Election Plan' (in inverted commas to indicate that the book was in progress) on hold and came up with an idea for a much shorter book that I could write and publish first. *My Year in Germany* (now *A Year in Germany*) was that idea. I had lived and studied for one academic year in Dresden in 2005/2006 as part of my four-year *Civil Engineering with German* university course, and *My Year in Germany* was my account of that year. On 27th March 2017, I got back to work on 'The Snap Election Plan'.

I was expecting the next general election to be in 2020, and I continued to build up the book with that in mind. Then, on 18th April 2017, things changed. I was in the local park with my children when my wife texted me the news: the UK prime minister, Theresa May, had announced her intention to hold a snap general election on 8th June! When I got a chance to think, I questioned whether I should try to publish my plan for voting reform so that I could try to

implement it for the forthcoming election. I worked out what it would have needed: register a political party; find candidates while the party application was being processed; raise funds for candidate deposits; raise funds for administration; and convince enough people to vote for the candidates. When I looked at the timescale, I realised that it was too farfetched. Instead of investing my time on what I saw as a fruitless exercise, I decided to let the 2017 general election go, and focus, instead, on planning for the next one.

I continued to work on this book but, as the election campaign progressed, I became increasingly conscious that my efforts might not be necessary. I read articles that suggested that Labour might include voting reform in its manifesto. I also questioned whether a voting-reform referendum might result from a hung parliament, as happened in 2010. So, while I waited for election day, I focused my efforts elsewhere. I recalled that, from February to December 2008, I had written email updates to my family and friends during my travels around parts of Oceania and Asia. Since I already had the material, in lots of 1s and 0s in storage somewhere in the world, I decided to write and publish a book of my account of my travels during that time. *Travels in Distant Lands* was the result. I held off publishing it until this book was ready, to minimise distractions from what I was most passionate about.

When the Labour manifesto was published, the sceptical part of me wasn't surprised that it lacked no commitment on a voting-reform referendum. There was still the chance of a hung parliament, though. To the surprise of many, including myself, the election *did* result in a hung parliament. However, it wasn't in the right proportions to bring in the Liberal Democrats, probably the most likely partner to initiate a voting-reform referendum. I pressed on with 'The Snap Election Plan'.

On 6th April 2017, a UK government online petition entitled 'To make votes matter, adopt Proportional Representation for UK General Elections' closed with 103,495 signatures. Unfortunately, I had only learned of the petition not long after it had closed, so I hadn't signed it. Given that the petition had more than 100,000 signatures, parliament had to consider debating it. As the months went by, I eagerly checked the webpage to see if they would. In mid-September, I learned that parliament had decided to do just that, and

that the date for the debate would be 30th October 2017. I wrote to my MP to urge him to do what he could during the debate, and I posted a link on Facebook urging people to write to their MPs too. Although I was hoping that the debate would bring about voting reform, the lack of appeal on the subject by the Conservative and Labour parties suggested to me that the debate would result in no direct action.

On 30th October 2017, I watched the debate online. I was impressed by some of the excellent speeches and questioning, and how the Scottish National Party advocated for voting reform despite being direct beneficiaries of FPTP themselves.

It was 2nd December 2017. I was using the Internet to research voting-reform pressure groups that were based in the UK. As I browsed the ‘The Alliance’ page of the Make Votes Matter website, I came across ‘ProPR’. I browsed their website, Facebook page, and blog. The following is an extract from the webpage propblog.wordpress.com, posted in a blog dated 30th September 2015:

...there is a strategy and the Green Party knows what it is, because it was passed at the Party’s Spring Conference. The motion was introduced by Will White and reads:

“GPEx and the leaders of the Green Party will work with other interested parties to replace the First Past the Post voting system with Proportional Representation as soon as possible, and to call a new PR election as soon as possible to more fairly reflect the opinion of the electorate.”

And the following is an extract from the same webpage, posted in a blog dated 2nd October 2015:

We at ProPR believe that the Proportional Representation Principle IS the software we need to hack the FPTP electoral system. The Principle states that any pro PR party should only have the single policy of “Bring in PR and then call a new election” in its FPTP election manifesto. If all the pro PR parties adopt this principle,

there would be no political barriers preventing them from forging a very strong pact, which Labour would be tempted to join. With Labour on board, a General Election victory would be guaranteed and PR would be introduced.

When I read all this, I was shocked that I hadn't discovered it sooner. I was also delighted to have discovered like-minded people.

The snap election plan (I write the plan itself in lower case) uses one of the ideas that are introduced above, in that a snap general election should be called as soon as voting-reform legislation has been passed (if the electorate so wishes). But this is where the similarities appear to end. The snap election plan does *not* seek to form pacts between parties. In fact, the plan doesn't call upon existing parties and politicians in any way. If voters wish to remain loyal to their voting-reform-supporting party, I anyway suggest that the best way to achieve that would be to *not* vote for that party at the next UK general election, as explained in this book.

Well, enough of how the book came to be. What comes next—and it's this that I'm passionate about—is how I can convince you that FPTP should be replaced with a proportional-representation voting system, and that the plan in this book is the best strategy to make it happen.

Introduction

When I was in my early teens, my father explained to me, at our kitchen table and with the aid of a sketch, the concept of the United Kingdom's first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system. I started to play around with the system in my head and remember seeing flaws with it. For example, I set up a two-party scenario and ran a hypothetical election. In 50.1 % of the constituencies, Party A got 50.1 % of the votes; in the other constituencies, Party B got 100 % of the vote. The result, despite Party B getting 75 % of the votes, was a majority government for Party A. Another scenario I considered was one in which the winner of each constituency won each seat with only 10 % of the votes, thus getting complete control of the House of Commons with only a 10 % vote share. The likelihood of these scenarios occurring was negligible, I thought. But why have a system that *could*, in theory, produce such results?

As I got older, it didn't bother me. I had more important matters to deal with, like studying for my GCSE exams, and then my A-levels. My interest was mainly in mathematics, science, and sport, not politics. During my late teens and twenties, I had a reasonable interest in politics and current affairs, but my focus was elsewhere: engineering. I studied *Civil Engineering with German* at university, then travelled, then got a full-time job in engineering to develop my career.

Over the years, I still maintained some interest in politics and democracy; I voted in the general elections and some of the other elections. In 2011, I somehow managed not to know about the referendum on voting reform. Had I known about it, I would certainly have voted to change the voting system from FPTP to the 'alternative vote' (AV) system. AV was not a proportional-representation (PR) voting system, but it would have meant that the Conservative and Unionist party and the Labour party would have needed to appeal to a broader audience within each constituency. Other benefits would have been that AV would have reduced the tendency for tactical voting, and encouraged more people to become engaged in politics.

The result of the 2011 AV referendum was that the majority of those who cast valid votes preferred FPTP over AV (68:32, 42 % turnout). So, does that mean that 68 % of those who cast valid votes

want to keep FPTP now? I don't believe this is the case. Firstly, six and a half years have passed since the referendum. Secondly, since 2011, there have been the 2015 general election, and the EU referendum. And both events, I believe, have heightened awareness of the inadequacies of FPTP—they certainly did for me. I remember being appalled by the grossly disproportionate 2015 general election results, and I clearly remember my feelings of disbelief and devastation in the small hours of 24th June 2016 as the referendum result solidified. Recent polls suggest that the public are in favour of a PR voting system, and I believe that the time is right to give the people of the UK a chance to have a meaningful say on the matter.

When writing this book, I often found myself using 'our' instead of 'Britons', and 'our country' instead of 'the UK'. The primary purpose of this book is to appeal, after all, directly to the people of the UK. After consideration, though, I decided to broaden the appeal. I realised that there were many other countries that used FPTP as their primary voting system, and I wanted to appeal to the people of those countries too, in case they might want to use the ideas in this book to bring about reform in their own countries.

You might be asking what makes me think that my views on politics should hold weight, given that I have no expertise or experience in the field. My answer is this: I am an average UK voter, and it's people like me, and people who influence people like me, who will, ultimately, decide the UK's future. I hope that this book and plan are not judged by who wrote them, but for what they are. Ultimately, this book is not about me. It is about the future of the UK, and the place that the UK has in the world.

This book is not about discussing additional domestic and international challenges that the UK faces e.g. defence, healthcare, education, policing, housing, infrastructure, and foreign policy. It is not even about discussing further means to improve democracy in the UK. All these matters *are* important matters for debate, and should be, where necessary, reformed; but the UK's voting system underpins all of them. Trying to improve defence, healthcare, education etc., before fixing the voting system is like trying to fix a faulty car with faulty tools.

There is something else that this book is not. It is not a technical report or a scientific paper. I suspect that it will contain errors, and some repetition, and that the plan that I set out will face challenges. But if I had wanted this book to be 100 % accurate, and if I had wanted the plan to be unshakable, I would have spent three times as

long on them. I intentionally traded accuracy and thoroughness for time. In essence, this book is not intended as a reference book, but as the start of a journey.

I dedicate a big chunk of this book to trying to convince you that voting reform is needed. I would be keen to hear your views on this, and to widen the discussion on voting reform. Ultimately, however, what matters to me is not whether you agree with me on *why* voting reform is needed, but that we agree that it *is* needed.

I suspect that there are people of all ages right across the country who would love to get more involved in politics, but realise that, to get anywhere, they would have to play along with the rigged system; standing for what one believes in would have to come second. I hope that this book might inspire them to believe in hope, that change is possible.

I have enjoyed every minute of writing this book, and I am keen to see what the response is. If you like the plan and want to show your support, please read the chapter entitled 'A Call to Action'. Whether you like the plan or not, know that, if you are a Briton, the future of the UK *does* lie in your hands.

First Past the Post Must Be Replaced

Lead-in

The United Kingdom (UK) uses the first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system for its general elections. I argue in this chapter why this system is holding the UK back and why it should be replaced with a better system. Within this chapter, where I have written subchapter titles in speech marks, I discuss a supposed benefit of the FPTP system. For all other subchapters within this chapter I discuss a supposed drawback.

Background

Before discussing FPTP, I want to offer a brief explanation of how the system works, as well as how it came to be used for UK general elections.

As with all voting systems, FPTP allocates power using votes, and it works for UK general elections like this:

1. The UK is divided into 650 geographical regions called constituencies, most containing roughly the same number of voters.
2. Each constituency has one representative (known as a member of parliament, or MP), and this representative is a member of the House of Commons.
3. At a general election, for each constituency, candidates compete for the seat.
4. Each participating voter is given one ballot paper, listed on which are all of the standing candidates in their constituency. To cast a valid vote, the voter marks a cross in the box next to their favoured candidate.

5. Voting finishes and the votes are counted. In each constituency, the candidate with the most votes wins the seat. All other candidates in that constituency, regardless of their vote share, lose.

So that's roughly how FPTP works. But how did the system come to be used for UK general elections?

Representative democracy in the UK began in 1832 with the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1832 (England and Wales), the Irish Reform Act 1832 and the Scottish Reform Act 1832. These acts came about largely because of public pressure, and required that most members of the House of Commons were elected from two-member districts using the 'block vote' system. This system asked voters to cast up to as many votes as there were House of Commons seats for the respective constituency. In this case, one or two. Seats were then awarded to candidates in order of their respective vote shares.

The Representation of the People Act 1867 expanded the electorate by enfranchising the urban male working classes of England and Wales (Scotland and Ireland, as it was known then, followed with legislation in 1868). The 'block vote' system was replaced by the 'limited vote' system, which was similar but gave voters, for those constituencies that had more than one MP, as many votes as was one fewer than the number of seats to be allocated.

FPTP was first adopted in the UK as a result of the Third Reform Act of 1884, and for a combination of reasons. Firstly, politicians saw FPTP as an efficient means to manage the expanding electorate. Secondly, the biggest two parties at the time, the Conservative and Unionist ('Conservative' for short) party and the Liberal party, thought that it would benefit them. Thirdly, FPTP seemed, at the time, to be a natural successor to the 'limited vote' system due to their similarities. Fourthly, politicians could not agree on an alternative system. Proportional-representation (PR) voting systems, for example, were seen as 'un-English' by the majority of politicians and the public.

It was from the minority that supported PR that, in 1884, the Proportional Representation Society (now the Electoral Reform Society) was founded by Sir John Lubbock. And the society has pushed for a PR voting system since.

“FPTP keeps the constituency link”

Voting systems take a set of votes and use the votes to decide who should represent the people who cast those votes. Some voting systems elect representatives who are equally accountable to all voters, e.g. The Netherlands and Israel. Other voting systems break the largest geographical area (e.g. country) down into smaller geographical areas (e.g. constituencies), then elect representatives for those areas based on the votes cast *in* those areas. This latter type of voting system is far more common, and the category includes FPTP. The smaller geographical areas are known by different names across the world, e.g. regions, constituencies, wards, ridings, districts, states, and divisions.

If we use ‘constituency’ in the general sense of ‘geographical area that is a division of the biggest geographical area’, then most voting systems keep a constituency link. For example, if the UK were divided into two constituencies, and each one had 325 representatives, there would still be a constituency link (i.e. half the representatives are linked to one constituency, and the other half to the other). What is therefore implied by the title of this subchapter is that only one representative is accountable to each constituency i.e. single-representative constituencies. But then the assertion made in the title would apply to a two-constituency UK with just one representative for each one (i.e. a two-MP House of Commons), and would that be keeping the constituency link? Clearly, what is implied with this argument is that the constituency should be a single-member one, to ensure that the constituency is as small as possible. It also implies that there are a sufficient number of MPs (650 in this case) to ensure that those constituencies are reasonably small. It is with these assumptions that I will continue with the discussion.

I argue that having each constituency represented by one representative is not an optimal system. Instead, it is far better to have bigger constituencies that are represented by multiple representatives. The reason is this: the UK’s diverse population are not organised geographically into discrete packages. In every community, every village, every town, every city etc., there is diversity of culture, diversity of race, diversity of religion, diversity of political views, diversity of age, diversity of education etc., and these diverse attributes are *blended*. It is therefore logical to have a

diversity of representative to represent those people, and that takes more than one person.

Just as a business would put in place a team to bring together different skills to achieve a complex goal, a constituency should put in place a team of representatives who reflect the diverse and complex political, cultural, racial etc., make-up of a constituency. In the unlikely event that a constituency had no political diversity or complexity, that should simply be reflected by the fact that all representatives for that constituency have the same political views. Even then, there will still be diversity of age and gender.

At the highest level of government, should having small constituencies be a priority? Here in North Wales, I am already represented at two lower levels of government. At the lowest level, my ward is represented by a councillor. And at the middle level, I am represented by one constituency assembly member and four regional assembly members. So, I have enough local representation. I have enough people who are looking out for the interests of where I live and its surroundings. What I am crying out for—and I believe that I am not alone in this—is a system that allows me, along with all other voters, to elect a legislature whose focus is the strategic, high-level, long-term thinking that the country needs to prosper.

I want a legislature that will function efficiently in making decisions in terms of what is best for the UK *as a whole*, not one that is the sum of 650 local needs. Given the size of the UK, I do see the benefit in having multi-representative regions, so that there is some degree of regional accountability. But those regions should be much bigger than the constituencies that FPTP uses. Existing boundaries could be used, and the number of representatives that each region has should be proportional to the size of each region's electorate.

I believe that the UK, with the size of population that it has, should have three levels of government. I appreciate that most of the UK only has two levels of government and that, for those areas, having a single representative in the House of Commons is something that they value and appreciate. I can understand this desire to have local people making local decisions. But using FPTP for the House of Commons is not the solution to this need: devolution is. Considering England's population, area, and regional differences, it does strike me as poor governance to not devolve powers to the vast swathes of England that are clearly underrepresented.

Although the plan in this book does not include devolution in England, in my view, devolution in England should follow soon after voting reform. This would be necessary to allow local/regional people to make local/regional decisions, and it would take the pressure off the House of Commons to do this. Voting reform and devolution would not only benefit those areas that are under-represented, but also those areas that are over-represented in that it would create a fairer society across the UK, which *all* Britons would benefit from.

“FPTP denies a platform to extremists”

From a quick online search, there appear to be two definitions for ‘extremist’. Both of them describe someone, quite obviously, with extreme views, but one of them takes it further in that an extremist also intends to break laws. I will use ‘lawful extremist’ and ‘unlawful extremist’ to differentiate.

I encourage lawful extremism. Having a broader spectrum of political and religious beliefs makes the UK richer and more diverse, which in turn means that it has a bigger pool of ideas from which to gain perspective, solve, innovate, invent, and discover. Every discoverer and every inventor had, at the point of discovery or invention, an extreme view. And many of those discoveries and inventions came about because people dared to think the unthinkable, and to believe the unbelievable. Also, many political activists, who have gone down in history as heroes of their time, were, at the time, lawful extremists.

If lawful extremism should be discouraged, would it be a reasonable question to ask whether or not lawful extremists should only be given half a vote on polling day? Essentially, if one wants to live in a democracy, then everyone should be given an equal say, regardless how extreme their views, provided that no laws are broken.

Unlawful extremism is unacceptable in any shape or form, and should be handled as would any other unlawful acts: according to the law. Of course, laws only exist because the public at large decide they should. In a dictatorship, although those in charge might use the word ‘laws’, I make the distinction by thinking of them as orders. And it should be acceptable to consider disobeying orders in a dictatorship that one is born into, or one that has been imposed on

one. An example in history of the public behaving in this way, of disobeying orders, was the Arab Spring of 2010–2012.

Going back to lawful extremism. I disagree with the goal of moderating the views of lawful extremists. However, if the aim by denying lawful extremists a platform *is* to seek to moderate their views, then would denying them a platform actually achieve this? If we look at it the other way around, if extremists had the power to deny moderates a platform, would that make moderates think more extremely? Denying extremists a platform does not achieve the goal of changing their views. In fact, it makes it more difficult. What it does is push those extremists and those views underground. That is, those people and views move into areas that are less transparent, less visible, and sometimes illegal. Their views and arguments now have less exposure to the rationale and debate of mainstream public opinion, and they become surrounded more and more by like-minded people. So, although denying a platform to lawful extremists might appear, in the short term, to have moderated them, in all likelihood it will have emboldened them.

If indeed one wishes to moderate lawful extremists, the best way to achieve this is to give them the same platform as everyone else, respect their views, debate them, and have the attitude ‘what can I learn from this person’ not ‘how can I convert this person to my cause’. By having this attitude, one is not committing to change one’s own views, but one is getting out of one’s own trench and encouraging the other to do the same. If, indeed, the other person’s views have *good reason* to be extreme, then that will come through in the debate. If, on the other hand, the extremist has a view that moderates might also want to adopt, then much will have been gained by the exposure, and nothing lost.

Unlawful extremists, on the other hand, should clearly not be given a platform, but dealt with justly and fairly in accordance with the law, using the necessary force to do so. I would add, though, that my suspicion, without doing any research on this, is that the vast majority of unlawful extremists only became unlawful extremists because, before they decided to operate outside the law, their views were not given a platform, and because they and their views were not respected and appreciated for what they were.

In summary, denying a lawful extremist a platform that is available to moderates is unhealthy for democracy and society. The fact that FPTP does this is another reason why it needs to go.

“With FPTP we can kick the rascals out”

Under FPTP, if the electorate do not like a particular MP who is sitting in the House of Commons, the electorate can vote in such a way at the next general election that they are guaranteed that that individual will not be re-elected.

The ability for the electorate to have this level of control stems from the fact that, under FPTP, the electorate chooses from more than one candidate in each constituency, and only one candidate is rewarded with anything at all. What follows, therefore, is that, barring the extreme scenario of only one candidate standing, there will always be at least one loser in each constituency. Therefore, the electorate of each constituency has the option to make the incumbent MP one of those losers.

The argument could also be extended to government, although it is not as easy. To kick a government out of office, so that the incumbent governing party plays no role in the next government, the following two options are available to the electorate: (a) elect no MPs from that party or (b) give another party a majority of seats in the House of Commons. Using FPTP instead of a PR voting system, it is easier to achieve both of these, although the latter option is far more likely.

Although the electorate may choose who *not* to elect as MPs, and therefore may choose who not to elect to govern, the inverse to this does not hold true. That is, the electorate does not have control of who to elect. The options that are presented to the electorate are not chosen by the electorate, but by the political parties (local branches, not central) or individuals in the case of independents.

So, yes, I agree that it is easier to kick out individual MPs using FPTP, and also easier to kick out whole parties from government, but is this what is wanted from the House of Commons voting system? To illustrate why this apparent strength of FPTP is, indeed, a weakness, allow me to play devil’s advocate. If it is a desirable feature of FPTP for the electorate to be able to deselect MPs at the constituency level, why not extend this concept to the House of Commons, to be able to deselect entire parties? After the electorate has elected all 650 MPs to the House of Commons, the party with the most seats could be the winner of the House of Commons, in a similar way that the candidate in a constituency with the most votes is the winner of that constituency. All other parties could be losers,

leaving only MPs from the winning party to represent the country. If FPTP could be argued as fair because, no-matter which candidate in a constituency gets the most votes, that candidate wins, then could this system be argued as fair because, no-matter which party wins the most seats in the House of Commons, that party wins the house?

FPTP could even be used again so that, once one party has complete control of the House of Commons, all the MPs of the winning party are ranked by the vote share that they got in their respective constituencies. The top 10 % of MPs could be deemed the winners and all others could be the losers. This would give the electorate yet more control to be able to kick out unwanted MPs. After all, constituents might only have elected the candidate in the first place because he/she was the best of a bad bunch. So that might leave, say, 30 MPs from one party to have complete control of government and the House of Commons.

If this proposal seems absurd, it is likely because, even though the same FPTP system would be applied a further one or two time(s), and even though the system would give the electorate a better chance to kick out unwanted MPs and parties from government, the end result is that all power is given to the top, say, 5 % of candidates, all from the same party. Although they may have been the strongest at that particular election, they represent only a small proportion of the nation's views. Every time FPTP is used, power is concentrated and representation is narrowed.

By giving the electorate the level of control needed to kick out individual MPs, and kick out parties from government, focus is placed, not on the party as a whole, but on the sum of its parts. FPTP elects MPs directly, so MPs are, first and foremost, accountable to their constituents. Even when an MP is unfavourable within his/her political party, if he/she is liked by the electorate, he/she will likely keep being given the chance to stand for election. At the same time, an MP cannot just be accountable to his/her constituents: he/she depends on the overall image and success of his/her party, and there must be a certain degree of unity within the party in order for it to function. These two interests often align but, when they don't, it causes a political party to fracture. This can lead to internal party divisions, poor cohesion, no clear vision, poor leadership, and a lack of direction. It also results in a House of Commons that might not feel like a few different visions for a country, but instead the sum of the local demands of 650 different geographical areas of the UK. I have read reports of MPs being overworked, torn between their

constituency's needs and the demands of parliament and their respective party. Why does the UK choose a voting system that builds in this inherent conflict?

The ability to kick out those representatives who the electorate do not like is a bottom-up approach. Prior to a general election, it presents parties with a dilemma. They realise that, to optimise their appeal as a party, they need their best members as MPs. And to achieve this, they need those members to stand in constituencies that they are likely to win. On the other hand, to be successful as a party, parties need to win as many seats as possible, which means standing their stronger candidates in marginal constituencies. Why should parties have to choose one option or the other? There are voting systems that do not present parties with this dilemma, and instead align these objectives. The systems inevitably ask voters to vote for a party (independents are viewed as single-member parties) rather than a candidate, or to count the vote for a candidate as a vote also for that candidate's party.

To summarise, FPTP does give the electorate a fine degree of control, but the price for that is tactical voting, few competitive constituencies, short-termism, internal party conflicts, and poor proportionality.

"Proportional representation voting systems disadvantage independent candidates"

Most proportional-representation (PR) voting systems ask voters to vote for parties rather than individuals. A downside to this is that it puts independent candidates (those not associated with any party) at a disadvantage. The reason for this is that independents depend on their local knowledge, experience, and influence, to compete with parties. PR voting systems tend to use larger geographical areas, which negates the independent's strengths: he/she may still win votes from his/her immediate surroundings, but is unlikely to pick up many votes from elsewhere in the geographical area.

Another disincentive for independents to stand under PR systems is that they have no chance to be rewarded for votes beyond those needed to win a seat. Multi-member parties, on the other hand, have the possibility to be awarded further seats.

So, PR discourages independents. But does the UK want its House of Commons voting system to prioritise the needs of independents? Should the focus of the House of Commons be to represent the local needs of the electorate, or the strategic, high-level needs?

For electing representatives to the lowest level of legislature, e.g. councillors sitting in a local authority, I *am* in favour of voting for candidates and having those votes only count towards the individual candidates, and not their respective parties (if affiliated to one). The nature of local government means that the personal aspect of representation is more important than at higher levels of government, and the ability of independents to be on an equal playing field with parties is also important. Across the UK, local needs may be quite distinct to that locality. These needs might not be well represented by the ideologies of any one political party. Although the issues of conflict that I raised earlier would still apply (when candidates are affiliated with parties), the benefits, at the lowest level of legislature, of votes only counting towards candidates, outweigh the drawbacks. At a local level, my preference is the use of the ‘single transferable vote’ (STV) system.

“PR voting systems put power in the hands of those who list candidates”

PR always gives the electorate the say on how *many* representatives each party should have. It also always gives the electorate visibility of who would fill any seats that a party might win. What it does not always do is allow the electorate to choose who should fill each seat. Depending on which PR system is used, this task is sometimes done by the party in advance of the election. So, although the electorate does not always have a say on who is on the list, the electorate does have a veto on whether any of those members are elected. But does that mean that representatives are no-longer accountable to the electorate?

PR voting systems do make representatives more accountable to their respective party, because being popular with the electorate would not be enough to be reelected. If, for example, an MP was popular with the electorate, but had different ideologies to the party as a whole, the party might choose to cut its losses and choose not to

list that person as a candidate at the next general election. But, although accountability shifts from the electorate to the parties, overall accountability does not change, because parties themselves are fully accountable to the electorate. This concept is similar to that of a hierarchical business structure, in that staff at the bottom are still fully accountable (by a reporting chain) to the managing director.

Although final accountability lies with the electorate, the difference between the two approaches is in the brief that the electorate gives to the political parties. Under FPTP, the brief is: we want your MPs to be, first and foremost, accountable to our constituencies, not to the ideologies of your party; here are the MPs that you can have; now, as well as you can, try to work together in a unified, cohesive, and principled way. In contrast, under most PR voting systems, the brief is this: we want your MPs to be (mostly) accountable to you, and for you to be accountable to us; here are how many MPs we want you to have; we want you to fill [specify number] (sometimes this is 0) MP role vacancies with [specify list of representatives]; then we want you fill any remaining seats with those people who *you* think, from your master list, would best serve the needs of your party, and therefore the electorate; if you want us to vote for you next time, choose well!

Ultimately, whatever voting system is used, the electorate would be able to find out, prior to an election, which candidates could end up becoming representatives. If a voter really thought it worth not voting for a party because of a distaste for one or more potential representatives, then the voter would be under no obligation to vote for the party.

“The candidate with the most votes wins—there’s nothing fairer than that”

This argument’s strength is its simplicity, and simplicity should always hold weight, for good reason. But there is more to this argument than might at first seem apparent.

What is crucial with this discussion is what is meant by ‘win’. If it means that the candidate with the most votes should be rewarded more, if not the same, as any other candidate, then of course I agree. But, in the context of FPTP, ‘win’ means more than that. It means that, regardless of the vote shares of all the candidates in a constituency, the *only* reward is given to the one with the most votes.

All voting systems that are used, provided that they are properly implemented, could be argued as being fair in some way or another. After all, they are all a sequence of instructions, and those instructions don’t change depending on which candidate or which party they are operating on. But does that mean that all voting systems are equally fair? Take this as an example. A sequence of instructions might be written so that, once all constituency votes have been counted, if any weather station experienced rain in that constituency on polling day, that constituency loses its representation in the House of Commons, i.e. all candidates lose. Could this be argued as fair because any one constituency might experience rain on polling day? If this elicits a response of “no, of course it’s not fair, because some constituencies are more likely to experience more rain than others”, then I’m half way to arguing this point.

Here’s why FPTP is not fair. As soon as voters start to learn which candidates are more likely to win than others, voters start to think tactically so that they don’t waste their vote on a candidate who has no chance of winning. This has the double effect of not only depriving weaker candidates of votes that they would otherwise have won, but of then handing those votes to their competitors. Many voters choose not to buy in to the crooked system, and vote for their favoured party anyway; but it is estimated that around 15–20 % of votes are cast tactically at a UK general election—and, when taking the double effect into account, that’s a swing from smaller parties to bigger parties of 30 percentage points.

To explain the unfairness of tactical voting in a different way, imagine a company that had to decide how to allocate resources to three of its factories. The rates at which each factory could produce a certain product are in the proportions 400:300:100. Now, each factory needs resources in proportion to its production rate, but instead of allocating resources in the proportions 400:300:100, the company takes 15 % of the smallest factory's resources and gives them to the bigger factories. The effect is that the bigger factories are over-resourced and the smaller factory under-resourced. Any business that consistently allocated resources in this way would likely lose out to its competitors, and, ultimately, fail. It is this dynamic, of shifting resources/votes from smaller entities to bigger entities, purely because of size, that operates under FPTP.

Another reason why the title of this sub-chapter is misleading is that the second-placed candidate might get one thousand times more votes than the last-placed candidate, yet receive no recognition for this. Also, the winning candidate may only have the support of 20 % of the electorate. Would it be fair that 80 % of the electorate would be represented by a candidate whom they did not vote for? Since the bigger parties are, by definition, those who win more, more of their votes achieve something useful for them (i.e. win a seat) than do those for the smaller parties.

As I see it, the only time FPTP would be a fair system would be if there were only two options for the voter, or if FPTP's inherent unfairness would be sufficiently compensated for. An example of this would be the 'additional member system' where the ratio of list seats to FPTP seats is sufficiently high.

"FPTP avoids messy coalitions"

Cambridge Online Dictionary defines a 'coalition' as 'the joining together of different political parties for a particular purpose, usually for a limited time, or a government that is formed in this way'. It defines 'messy' as 'confused and unpleasant'.

If we replace 'political parties' with 'individuals', and replace 'government' with 'partnership', we get 'the joining together of different individuals or groups for a particular purpose, usually for a limited time, or a partnership that is formed in this way'. If this were the definition of 'coalition', and if we were to pick up on the fact that the word 'usually' is not 'always', the following would be

covered: business partnerships, business departments, charitable partnerships, political parties, and political unions. According to this revised definition, the union between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland would be a coalition. Could we even cover marriages and civil partnerships by this definition if we described their particular purpose as 'to have a life partner'? What about friendships? Could the definition cover these if the particular purpose of the joining together is to have a relationship with someone with whom one has things in common, for mutual benefit?

Although I am getting further away from the original definition of 'coalition', the point I am making is this: coalitions, or the principles that are associated with them, are all around us. They play a big part in every community that I can think of, and they do so for good reason. The benefits of coalitions and the principles that are associated with them are clear for all to see, and result in good things like productive businesses, trade agreements, peace agreements, families, friendships, security arrangements, and military alliances. Coalitions have existed since the dawn of civilisation itself, and have existed that long because more can be gained with coalitions than can be gained without them.

To state that FPTP (often) avoids messy coalitions is misleading. Under FPTP, the Conservative and Labour parties are *permanent* coalitions. This is common with FPTP, as FPTP gives incentives for two parties to become clear frontrunners, often becoming overcrowded in the process. The Conservative party is a coalition of Europhiles and Eurosceptics, and Labour of New Labour and traditional Labour. So, not only does FPTP give us majority governments that are not backed by majority views, but it gives us the illusion of stability when, in reality, power is squabbled over behind the scenes, without anyone laying down the rules of how that power should be shared. In contrast, the parties that form a coalition after an election using a PR voting system have the backing of the electorate to do so, and they only go into coalition if they agree, in advance, what the terms of that working arrangement will be. If negotiations become protracted, there is good reason for it. If parties are not able to agree amongst themselves how they should share power, is this not evidence enough that no-one is ready to start making policy decisions for the nation? It is far better to keep negotiating than to start making decisions just for the sake of making decisions. There is plenty of evidence for the success of

coalitions across Europe. And do any of the nations represented by those coalitions yearn for FPTP? Not one.

Coalitions between political parties incentivise and nurture positive skills, values, and attitudes such as collaboration, negotiation, forward-thinking, compromise, openness, team-work, skills sharing, power sharing, and the recognition of responsibility. In contrast to this, FPTP incentivises a culture of insulting, accusing, undermining, and deceiving. The opposition party will be safe in the knowledge that it will only be, at worst, in opposition. And smaller parties have little incentive to progressively building their support. FPTP has produced a political culture in which there is more emphasis on scoring points against one's political opponents than focusing one's efforts on practical, workable solutions. Of course opposition parties should scrutinise the government, but they should do so constructively, offering a viable alternative where the government's actions appear to have fallen short of what they believe would be best for the nation. Real majorities and coalitions incentivise this; FPTP does the opposite.

"PR results in small parties wielding more power than they deserve"

After a general election, if any one party has a majority of seats, that party normally forms a government. If this does not happen, a hung parliament results, and parties must work together to establish who should govern and how. In this case, all options involve two or more parties joining forces so that the necessary level of authority may be given to decisions that are agreed to be made. The result might be a coalition, in which cabinet roles are shared, manifestos are brought together to form a coalition plan etc., or the result might be a 'confidence and supply' arrangement, in which one party pledges at least enough support to the government for confidence and supply motions.

The number of different ways in which parties may combine after a hung parliament is determined by how many parties hold seats, how those seats are distributed amongst the parties, and who is prepared to work with whom. For each combination, all parties that are not the biggest (or all their leaders) have the potential to be kingmakers. When one of those potential kingmakers is part of the

final arrangement, those parties are then kingmakers. Essentially, a kingmaker is a party that brings a bigger party to power. The relative negotiating strength of a potential kingmaker is determined by how many different deals between parties are possible, how many other potential kingmakers there are, how seats are distributed amongst parties, how similar parties' policies are etc. And it is certainly true that PR voting systems bring with them a significantly higher chance of kingmakers being part of final government arrangements.

After the 2017 general election, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was a potential kingmaker in that it was a smaller party of a potential arrangement to bring the Conservative party to power (in government). The Conservative party ruled out simply counting on the DUP to vote to support it in confidence and supply motions, so it sought a formal arrangement. Due to no other viable option being available to the Conservative party, the DUP had a strong negotiating position. Part of the deal that it struck was that the Conservative party would pledge £1 billion to Northern Ireland, the region of the UK in which the DUP stood candidates. This was in addition to Northern Ireland's normal annual funding. In this instance, the DUP became a kingmaker. Additionally, I agree with the general consensus that the DUP's ten seats bought them a disproportionate amount of influence, i.e. more than $10/327^{\text{ths}}$ worth (the fraction is the number of DUP seats over the number of Conservative and DUP seats combined).

Going further back in UK history, the next example of a kingmaker was the Liberal Democrat party in the 2010 coalition with the Conservative party. For me, whether or not the Liberal Democrats had more than their fair share ($57/363^{\text{ths}}$) of influence in the resulting coalition deal is less obvious. I know many people were disappointed that they did not implement their student fees policies, but it seems like they made up for it with other policies. In any case, the Liberal Democrat party's negotiating strength was far less than it should have been, due to the fact that it only won 8.8 % of seats from 23.0 % of votes.

There is concern that a kingmaker could easily be one of the separatist parties of Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland, thus causing the UK to break up. It is not the secession itself that is the concern here (many, of course, are in favour of it), but the nature in which it might happen. Thankfully, from a democratic perspective, secession would be dependent on a referendum. Additionally, it must be stressed that a kingmaker only holds influence if parties are

prepared to negotiate with it. If one of the kingmaker's non-negotiable requirements for a deal is secession, other parties would be under no obligation to work with the kingmaker. In fact, a bigger party agreeing to support a policy that its supporters would be strongly against would be an act of immense self-harm.

Without doing any more research into this, it does seem as if, typically, a kingmaker's slice of power/influence is more than it deserves, as reflected by seats hares. However, a potential kingmaker might not have the strength of hand that might at first seem apparent: if it overplays its hand, it might run the risk of the bigger parties re-opening discussions with other potential kingmakers.

If it is, indeed, the case, that kingmakers enjoy a greater share of power than their seat shares indicate that they should have, does this cancel out the argument against FPTP that FPTP inflates powers of the dominant parties? To investigate further, I would like to compare the two by bringing in the concept of 'majority-makers'.

Let us consider a majority government under FPTP. Typically, the majority party will have a seat share that is greater than its nationwide vote share. If the latter is less than, or equal to, 50 %, then the majority party will have majority-makers. These are those MPs of the majority party who would not have been elected had the size of their party's seat share been identical to that of their vote share. Majority-makers are those MPs that are able to turn their party from being a minority one (by vote share) into a majority one (by seat share). It doesn't matter which MPs are the ones who are labelled as majority-makers. What matters is whether or not a party has one or more of them at all, and how many the party has in proportion to its other MPs. The biggest inflation of power from vote-share to seat-share in recent history occurred during the 2005 UK general election, in which Labour was awarded 55 % of the seats from 35 % of votes. This resulted in 126 majority-makers in the Labour party—35 % of all their MPs.

So, under FPTP we might have a majority party whose number of MPs is greater than it deserves according to its vote share. And, under PR voting systems, we might have a minority party that is a kingmaker, and whose power is greater than it deserves as reflected by its number of MPs. If we think of the additional power of a kingmaker as being measured by additional 'virtual MPs', we can make a direct comparison between a majority-maker and a virtual kingmaker MP. Now, which of the two is preferable? Is it preferable

to add majority-makers (i.e. add MPs to a party that is close to having a majority, so that it becomes a majority party), or is it preferable to add virtual kingmaker MPs (i.e. add more power to a minority party)? I will now discuss why I believe virtual kingmaker MPs are preferable.

Firstly, majority-makers are a direct consequence of a general election, and are able to use their powers immediately to support the formation of a majority government. Becoming a majority-maker takes no additional effort beyond becoming an MP: it's purely a product of the system. Virtual kingmaker MPs, on the other hand, have to earn their status. They have to be associated with a party that is approachable, collaborative, and one that has good negotiating skills. And they only earn their status if other parties choose to work with theirs. In addition, those other parties must be sizeable: trying to use the support of another small party in isolation to achieve kingmaker status would fail. So, any potential virtual kingmaker MP must first contend with this check on power.

Secondly, majority-makers exist because they have taken their power from smaller parties. Virtual kingmaker MPs exist, on the other hand, because they have taken power from bigger parties. If power has to be shifted one way or the other, the latter is preferable because it is a check on power.

Thirdly, when the seat share that is held by either a single party or a coalition of parties breaches the 50 % seat-share threshold, power jumps to close to 100 %. The reason it's not 100 % is because of the power of the House of Lords. When a single party is given this big boost of power by majority-makers, that boost is retained within a single entity. In comparison, when a coalition of parties is handed that boost of power, the power is *shared*. And the boost of power is shared in the proportions that are roughly equivalent (allowing for distortions by virtual kingmaker MPs) to seat shares, which are determined by the electorate. It could be argued that, as the bigger parties are, in effect, coalitions in themselves, the boost enjoyed by quasi-majority governments is also shared. But the crucial difference is that the electorate do not have a say in how this power is shared, and the MPs within these bigger parties often squabble over this additional power.

In conclusion, PR voting systems do make it more likely that, in each general election, one or more smaller parties is likely to wield more power than would be proportional to their vote share.

However, this is a small price to pay to avoid consistently giving the two dominant parties more security and power than they deserve.

"FPTP avoids horse-trading behind closed doors"

The argument goes like this:

1. After a hung parliament, parties negotiate in private to try to form a government. This results in parties trading off their policies in return for power, so that they may implement those policies. The strength of each party's negotiating position is determined mainly by its seat share and how that compares with other parties. Its position is also, to some extent, affected by each party's vote share.
2. This negotiation happens after the election. For this reason, the electorate as a whole has no say in this process, either during the negotiation, or on the agreed terms. (A party may, however, put any agreed terms to a vote of its own members.)
3. In contrast, an election that gives one party a majority in the House of Commons produces a government that can be held to account according to its manifesto, which is a document that was available to voters prior to the election.
4. FPTP offers a greater chance of producing a majority government, so FPTP is better than other voting systems in this regard.

Firstly, FPTP does offer a higher chance of producing majority governments. One only has to look at the outcomes of elections that have used other voting systems to see this. But these governments are only majority by seat share, not vote share.

Secondly, the idea that voters have no say in the private negotiations between parties following a hung-parliament is misleading. The reason for this is that general elections are not one-off events. Their cyclical nature means that, if a party operates in a way contrary to what its supporters expect, this betrayal of trust means that voters might never vote for that party again. In that sense, coalition negotiations could be seen as not only the start of

the campaign of the next general election, but the start of the campaign for *all* remaining elections that the voter is able to vote in. Any short-sighted attempts to grab power in a coalition could have far-reaching consequences for the party and its MPs.

As for holding government to account, let's look at the UK's recent past. The 2010 coalition negotiation between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties resulted in the document entitled 'The Coalition: our programme for government'. So, in the same way that a quasi-majority government (i.e. one that has a majority seat share but not a majority vote share) would be able to be held to account according to its manifesto, a coalition government would be able to be held to account according to the document of agreed policies that resulted from the negotiation. And I argue that the latter holds more weight than the former because the latter is an agreement of what will be done, not a pitch to win votes. The following is an extract from the foreword of the document:

As our parties have worked together it has become increasingly clear to us that, although there are differences, there is also common ground. We share a conviction that the days of big government are over; that centralisation and top-down control have proved a failure. We believe that the time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today; to recognise that we will only make progress if we help people to come together to make life better. In short, it is our ambition to distribute power and opportunity to people rather than hoarding authority within government. That way, we can build the free, fair and responsible society we want to see.

And further on:

In every part of this agreement, we have gone further than simply adopting those policies where we previously overlapped. We have found that a combination of our parties' best ideas and attitudes has produced a programme for government that is more radical and comprehensive than our individual manifestos.

This language is positive and constructive, and resulted from *inter-party* coalition negotiations. It resulted from the bringing together of ideas and views that were backed not only by the majority of MPs, but the majority of the those who cast valid votes. If horse-trading

behind closed doors it what it takes to achieve this, then bring on the horse-trading behind closed doors.

“FPTP is easy to understand”

I accept that simplicity is a strong argument in favour of FPTP. When solving any problem, how simple a solution is should always hold weight. A simple solution will minimise resources, which can then be invested elsewhere. But should simplicity be the overriding argument for which voting system to use? If so, why not just let one person in each constituency vote under FPTP? It could be, for example, the oldest citizen? That would be far simpler than managing the logistics of polling day as it is. Clearly, simplicity as a strength must be balanced with all other weighted factors. So, the fact that FPTP is simple compared to other voting systems is not, in itself, a good reason to keep it.

Essentially, every voting system asks from voters the same thing: decide what you want; learn what each option gives you; then order the options by preference. From the point of view of the voter, that is as complicated as it gets. FPTP asks this of the voter, but then only asks for the voter’s first choice. Although FPTP does not necessarily need the voter to rank all other candidates (in one’s mind, not on paper), it does require the voter to compare what they think is their favourite candidate with—by definition of ‘favourite’—*all* the other options. So, all that another voting system might do is ask the voter to then put aside their top candidate, and repeat the process, each time choosing their favourite candidate. What results is a list in order of preference.

What goes on behind the scenes, once all the votes are cast, can be much more complex, but the voter need only know as much about this process as he/she wants. If one could choose any car one wanted, would one choose the one that had the electronics that were the easiest to understand? Or would one choose a car based on what the *result* of those electronics (and other innards) is. Sure, maintenance and such like come into that decision, but a voting system is simply a set of instructions that converts one set of data into another. When choosing a voting system, what’s more important: how the system *works*, or what it *achieves*?

“FPTP can be processed quickly”

I am used to voting in a general election on a Thursday, then finding out the result of most of the constituencies the following morning. It's an exciting process: the voting day; the exit polls; the race to get the first results in; people working through the night; the droopy eyes the next day. It's also good to know quickly what the result is. So, I accept that FPTP being quick to process is an argument in favour of it, but then so is the fact that 'first past the post' is quicker to write than, say, 'additional member system'. What we're debating is the institution that forms the bedrock of the UK's democracy; the institution that decides how power is shared at the highest level of governance; and the institution that, under optimal circumstances, would not be utilised again for another five years. Unless the balance of all other arguments produces no decision, not even by a marginal amount, I suggest that this argument is left well alone.

FPTP is divisive

FPTP encourages the breakup of the UK, and this is two-stage process. The first stage is the fracturing of society due to undermining of the political and democratic institutions upon which society depends. The second stage is the incentive for parties, where they are not one of two dominant ones, to represent discrete geographical regions only. For smaller parties, FPTP rewards those who build up high concentrations of support before seeking to expand their support by area, if at all. So, a party that has, say, 50 % support in 10 constituencies is, in general, rewarded far more than a party that has 10 % support in 50 constituencies. The discrete geographical regions could be London, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the South West, the North East etc.

A good example of existing borders being used to concentrate support geographically is the Scottish National Party (SNP). However, even though they benefit hugely from FPTP, to their credit, they support the adoption of a PR system. At the 2017 general election, the SNP's seat share was 5.4 % (35/650) and their vote share was 3.0 %. A useful metric, to compare parties, is the seat share to vote share. For the SNP, it was 1.8. Other smaller parties that concentrate their efforts on a smaller proportion of the UK electorate rather than a bigger one are the Democratic Unionist Party (1.7), Sinn Féin (1.5), and Plaid Cymru (1.2). In comparison, examples of parties that applied their efforts to a larger portion of the electorate are the Liberal Democrats (0.3) and the Green Party of England and Wales (0.1). UKIP is another one and, had they been awarded just one seat, they would have had a ratio of 0.1.

There is a clear pattern here, that those parties who are not one of the big two, and who seek to represent most of the UK, are penalised for doing so. Conversely, those smaller parties who seek to represent the interests of only a smaller geographical area of the UK are rewarded. Incidentally, not one party stood a candidate in every constituency at the 2017 general election. This even holds true if one disregards the fact the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties did not stand, by tradition, against the speaker of the House of Commons in the constituency of Buckingham. To summarise so far, FPTP encourages smaller parties to use geographical areas and boundaries, not values, ideologies, and vision, to build support.

Whether one is in favour of the breakup of the UK or not, this divisive effect of FPTP would apply at any level. If the UK broke up into, say, England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and FPTP was used in each, the further break-up of those regions would be encouraged by FPTP.

For smaller parties, FPTP starts from a position of exclusion and division. Conversely, PR voting systems incentivise parties to be inclusive, and stand for principles, ideologies, policies, and values that are not linked to any one part of the country. In this way, PR systems incentivise unity, not division. Any party under a PR voting system that attempts to use boundaries as a means to win support would be penalised in that it would restrict its support base and therefore put a cap on its size.

If one *is* in favour of the break-up of the UK, under PR, there would be a legitimate, democratic means by which to do that. It could be implemented in the same way that any other policy could be implemented: by voting for a party that stood for it. For those in favour of secession from the UK, how this might be achieved should be according to the written (but uncodified) constitution of the UK.

FPTP generates bitterness, frustration, intolerance, tension, and anger

I have read reports of politicians and journalists being abused and intimidated. I do not condone threats, abuse, or intimidation in any way, shape, or form. At the same time, I can understand why FPTP has generated feelings of bitterness, frustration, intolerance, tension, and anger. Britons want to have a meaningful say in how they are governed, in what identity they have, and in how the UK meets the challenges of a fast-changing world. Under FPTP, they are deprived of this.

FPTP suppresses creativity and innovation

No one party represents my political views. For example, on Brexit, I believe that the UK should leave the EU according to the two-year timescale. It should prioritise honouring the result as quickly as possible, according to what 'leave' meant at the time of the

referendum. There should be no transition period. This would undoubtedly result in turmoil, but at least everyone would know what to expect, and could plan for it. This would also ensure that the will of the people would have been honoured as quickly as possible. Towards the end of the leaving process, the UK should hold a second EU referendum, asking the electorate: once the UK has left the EU, do you want the UK to apply to re-join? This second referendum would in no way undermine the first, because the first one put no time commitment on how long the UK would have to wait before applying to re-join. The second referendum could include an option for partial membership like that that Norway enjoys. Asking this question before embarking on negotiating a new deal might mean that a new deal might not even be necessary (if the UK votes to apply to re-join, and then meets those application requirements).

My preferred course of action for Brexit is just one of many ideas that anyone might have that could be represented by a political party. On all sorts of other areas of policy, there is a multitude of political positions that are not represented by a party. This lack of choice is a direct result of FPTP.

To use a business analogy, just as big companies take more time to change direction, implement new ideas etc., the two big political parties are tied down, to some extent, by their size, by their internal disputes, and by their attachment to traditional ways of thinking. In the business world, start-ups use creativity, innovation, and speed, to disrupt whole industries. Although many people are dismayed by it at the time, history has shown us that these disruptions improve our way of life. Were it not for the stifling effects of FPTP, there would undoubtedly be more creativity and innovation in politics.

Voters have little choice

In this modern era, the people of the UK do not fit into two neat categories like most of them did in the 19th century when FPTP was introduced. In 21st century UK, the landscape of political views is much more diverse.

To clarify what is meant by the title of this sub-chapter, it is not that each voter is not presented with several candidates. There are, in fact, a multitude of smaller parties that stand candidates right across the UK. The problem is that, due to FPTP, only one, two, or, rarely,

three of those, will have a chance of winning any one seat. So, if one wants one's vote to have a chance of being represented, one first has to hope that one lives in a marginal constituency, or that one lives in a constituency whose support is for one's favoured candidate. As a measure of how well contested seats are, I looked at the vote figures for each constituency for the 2017 UK general election. Of the 650 MPs that were elected, only 107 of those beat the second-placed candidate by 15 % or fewer votes.

So, voters that live in non-marginal seats simply don't have any choice. If they support the top candidate, they're in luck; if not, and if one does not wish to move home to a marginal constituency, it's just tough. For those who do live in marginal constituencies, and if they want their vote to have a chance of counting, they are mostly limited to a choice of two candidates—three if they're lucky.

Quasi-majority governments overextend themselves

Quasi-majority governments make decisions with the authority of a majority but with the backing of a minority. This leads to wasted efforts. As soon as the opposition gets into power, much of these efforts are not only undone, but effort is wasted in a different direction.

In comparison, a government that is elected using a PR voting system would be able to make decisions with authority *and* have majority backing. Under PR voting systems, if one party achieves a majority, then that party deserves its majority, and none of the resulting government's decisions are, in principle, wasted efforts. What is much more likely is the formation of a coalition government. In its most basic sense, a coalition between say, a party that takes 40 % of the votes, and a party that takes 20 % of the votes, would agree to implement two thirds of the first party's manifesto and one third of the second party's. Also, cabinet roles would be allocated according to similar proportions. The coalition would then have a clear combined vision for five years, with majority backing of those who cast valid votes. The 2010 Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition was based on these basic principles of power sharing and, to the surprise of many, it ran relatively smoothly.

Quasi-majority governments make minority decisions

The following list is of the last ten UK general elections. For each, I have stated the winning party, its leader by surname, its vote share (%), and its seat share (%).

1979	Conservative	Thatcher	43.9	53.4
1983	Conservative	Thatcher	42.4	61.1
1987	Conservative	Thatcher	42.2	57.8
1992	Conservative	Major	41.9	51.6
1997	Labour	Blair	43.2	63.4
2001	Labour	Blair	40.7	62.7
2005	Labour	Blair	35.2	55.0
2010	Conservative	Cameron	36.1	47.1
2015	Conservative	Cameron	36.8	50.8
2017	Conservative	May	42.4	48.9

The discrepancy between vote share and seat share is clear to see. At each of the ten elections, when the winning party (i.e. the party that was awarded the most seats) was awarded a majority of seats in parliament, the winning party did *not* have majority support of those who cast valid votes. When the winning party was awarded close to a majority (2010 and 2017), the winning party's respective vote share was *not* close to a majority. The discrepancy between vote share and seat share is, of course, due to the voting system that is used to convert from one to the other: FPTP.

How different might the UK be today had the UK's voting system not inflated power of the big parties and deflated that of the small? Would Thatcher have brought about the controversial changes that she did in the 80s had her command of the House of Commons been more like 43 % instead of 57 %? Would Major have been able to privatise British Rail in the 1990s with 42 % support instead of 52 %? Would Blair have taken the UK into war in Iraq in 2001 had he commanded 41 % of the House of Commons instead of 63 %? At the 2010 general election, the Liberal Democrats secured 23 % of votes yet only 8.8 % of seats. Would they have been able to use this additional influence to secure a referendum on a PR voting system instead of AV? Would this have led to the electorate choosing

a PR voting system, allowing UKIP to have fair representation at the UK 2015 general election, and taking pressure off the Conservative party to pledge, at that same election, an EU referendum?

These questions are speculation, but why does the UK choose to use a voting system that even leaves these matters open to speculation?

FPTP is susceptible to gerrymandering

FPTP is an ideal voting system for those who wish to manipulate boundaries. Those in positions of power who do this do so because it is a way to rig the voting system so that, election after election, their party can squeeze more power out of the votes that it gets. To see how the argument in this sub-chapter's title stands up to scrutiny, let's run a thought experiment.

Imagine if FPTP is used in a country that is divided into 64 constituencies and only has two political parties: the Big party and the Small party. Let's say that, at a general election, the same number of valid votes are cast in each constituency, and let's say that voters are always loyal to one party or the other. At a general election, half the constituencies are won by the Big party and half by the Small party. Now let's start gerrymandering. Take each constituency in turn and merge it with any one of the remaining unmerged constituencies. Eliminate one of the representatives so that this new, bigger constituency also only has one representative.

There are three possible types of merger. If we define a constituency that was won by the Big party as 'B' and a constituency that was won by the Small party as 'S', then the three types of merger are: BB, SS, and BS. Due to mergers, there are now only half as many constituencies as previously, and half as many seats to be won. But who wins each new seat? Clearly, for the BB constituencies, the Big party wins, as it won both the constituent constituencies. Following the same rationale, for the SS constituencies, the Small party wins. But who wins the BS constituencies? This depends on the vote shares within the constituent constituencies. Let's say that, for BS constituencies, the vote shares of the two constituent constituencies were (in the order Big:Small) 70:30 and 40:60. Merging of each produces a vote share of 55:45, which the Big party wins.

In conclusion then: BB constituencies are a win for the Big party; SS constituencies are a win for the Small party; and BS constituencies are a win for the Big party. This means that the Big party has nothing to lose from the merging process, and much to gain. The Small party's best hope is that all mergers are either BB or SS mergers. At the start of the process, the seat shares were 50:50. By the end of the process, the seat shares could be anything from 50:50 to 100:0.

If this process was repeated, so that a further round of mergers happened, and so that the number of constituencies (and representatives) halved again, the same principles would apply. That is, the Big party would have nothing to lose and much to gain, whereas the best the Small party could hope for is no change. If we run several more rounds of merger, each time halving the numbers, we end up with two constituencies. If the Small party had lasted this long, the two constituencies would have the vote shares 70:30 and 40:60. If we ran one final round of merging, the Small party would no-longer be able to avoid a BS merger, and the final constituency would be won by the Big party. This would give the Big party the only seat, changing the seat shares from 50:50 to 100:0

In this experiment, it took several rounds of merger for the Big party to finally benefit. But this took exceptional circumstances. In most cases, if mergers are going ahead, they are being chosen such that they benefit one party or another. To be able to draw a general conclusion from this, a useful metric to use is the ratio of the number of voters per representative. In the experiment, merging two constituencies caused the number of voters to double, with the number of representatives to remain at one. So, the ratio doubled. In general, then, we can state that the bigger the ratio of voters to representatives in the FPTP system, the more it benefits bigger parties.

To take the experiment to the other extreme, instead of merging the 64 constituencies, imagine breaking them into smaller ones, each time giving the new constituency one representative. Keep breaking them down and adding representatives until there are as many constituencies as there are voters. This would be impractical, as there would need to be many more candidates than there are voters. But this is just a thought experiment, so anything goes. The effect of having all those constituencies and representatives would be to end up with seat allocations in the exact same proportions as the aggregated vote shares across the entire area covered by the election.

At this end of the FPTP scale, the result defaults to a purely proportional system, albeit to a dysfunctional one with millions of representatives. Moving to this end of the FPTP scale, the trend posited above holds true: the smaller the number of voters per representative, the less the bigger parties benefit from FPTP (and the more the smaller parties are able to compete fairly).

It's not just merging that can be used with FPTP to benefit bigger parties. Re-drawing boundaries can also achieve this. In theory, it could benefit smaller parties, but it is always the bigger parties who are the ones who have the power to do this, so any changes that are made are made to benefit the bigger parties. To illustrate how this works, imagine two neighbouring constituencies. Let's say that, in the first, the biggest nationwide party comes second by a small margin. And in the second constituency, the biggest nationwide party wins comfortably. Now, if only the biggest nationwide party could take some of its votes from the second constituency and give them to the first. Although votes/voters can't be moved, boundaries can. If its voters happen to live near the shared border, the effect of moving votes can be achieved by moving the border in that area. Doing this, however, would increase the size of the electorate in one constituency and decrease it in the other. To get around this, the border can be shifted in the opposite direction somewhere further along, where the bigger party's concentration of support is less. So now, even though the electorate *sizes* have not changed, the voter *concentrations* have. The end result is that the biggest nationwide party wins both seats instead of one.

A small chunk of votes decides a big chunk of power

The winner-takes-all approach of FPTP means that seats can be won with wafer-thin margins. Take this example. At the 2017 UK general election, the SNP won the 'North East Fife' constituency with a majority of two votes over the Liberal Democrat party. When this is considered at the House of Commons level, the SNP won 977,568 votes and 35 seats. So, by increasing their vote share from 977,565 to 977,568 (0.000003 % increase) they were able to increase their seat share from 34 to 35 (0.03 % increase). For this one seat gained, the proportion of votes to seats was out by a factor of 10,000.

One could argue that, in the grand scheme of the UK, 35 seats instead of 34 is not overly significant (it clearly is significant to the constituents of North East Fife). But what if that one seat was the one that, when combined with the seats of other parties, made commanding the majority of the House of Commons possible? Or what if it made the difference between *one* party having majority control of the house or not? And what if not getting that seat meant that the seat went to one of the other parties, perhaps doubling their presence in the House of Commons? I use the SNP as an example because they happened to win the constituency by the smallest margin, but that party could have been any of them.

Following the election, the ability of the Conservative party to command a majority of the House of Commons, and therefore form a government, was based on the fact they had the support of the DUP. Between them, they were able to command 327 seats, commanding a majority by two seats. If we now look at those seats that were won by the Conservative party or the DUP with the smallest majorities, we come across 'Southampton, Itchen' and 'Richmond Park'. The former was won by the Conservative party with a majority of 31 votes over Labour. So, had 16 voters chosen to vote for the Labour party instead of the Conservative party, the Conservative party would not have won that seat. In Richmond Park, the Conservative party won the seat over the Liberal Democrat party with a majority of 45. The same calculation shows that, had 23 voters voted Liberal Democrat that day instead of Conservative, the Conservative party would not have won that seat. What this amounts to is that, for the 2017 UK general election, the fact that the Conservative party was in a position to approach the DUP to seek to

command a majority of the House of Commons was determined by...39 Britons! I should point out that it could have been any number of marginal constituencies that ended up with the closest margins.

What might have happened had 39 Britons voted differently in this way? The Conservative party would still have won the election, but now only with 315 seats. With the support of the DUP, this would have totalled 325 seats. With Sinn Féin not taking its seven seats, this would still have been a working majority. However, there would have been nothing, in theory, to stop Sinn Féin doing so in the future. Would the DUP have wanted to have struck a deal that would have been so heavily dependent on Sinn Féin's absence from the House of Commons? Might the Conservative party have sought support from elsewhere? Would they have found it?

If we go back to the starting seat share of the 2017 results, the results could have swung the other way and handed the Conservative party a majority of the House of Commons. Their 317 seats were 9 short of the 326 needed for a majority. Looking at the constituency results, and following a similar process, we see that, had 528 Britons voted for the Conservative candidate instead of the winning candidate in key constituencies, the Conservative party would have won these 9 extra seats needed to form a majority government. 528 is only 0.0016 % (one in every 60,993) of all valid votes cast. To illustrate how small a number this is, if those voters spread themselves evenly across the UK, there would not be enough to fill each constituency with one person.

Staying with the 2017 results, a progressive alliance between Labour, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, and an independent, would have been able to block the Conservative party forming a government had seven seats swung from the Conservative party to one of these alliance parties. Looking at the seven smallest-margin constituencies that were won by the Conservative party over one of these parties, had 768 votes swung from the Conservative party to the next-best party, the progressive alliance would have been able to block the Conservative party from commanding a majority of the House of Commons. There is a good chance that Jeremy Corbyn would then have become the UK prime minister.

Going back to the 2015 general election, the Conservative party won 330 seats and would have been deprived of five seats and their majority had 427 voters voted Labour instead of Conservative.

I could produce an array of facts based on various combinations from previous general elections, but I hope I have made the point that I wanted to make: the voting system that the UK uses to elect members to its most powerful legislature is volatile. Using FPTP, the future of so many Britons is decided by so few.

Voters are under-represented and MPs are under-supported

Under FPTP, MPs, as well as representing their parties, must represent all their constituents, regardless of how their constituents voted. For the 2017 general election, the average vote share of each constituency's winning candidate was 56 %. That means that 44 % of all voters are now being represented by an MP who does not represent their political views. In reality, considerably more than 44 % of voters are poorly represented in this way due to tactical voting.

Not only are constituents under-represented, but their MPs are under-supported. There could be two neighbouring constituencies that voted 51:49 in favour of Conservative in one and 49:51 in favour of Labour in the other but, due to FPTP, each MP would only be able to represent half of his/her supporters across both constituencies.

FPTP and hype

After the 2016 EU referendum, some of the smaller parties took up a position of wanting a second EU referendum. The policy was that this second referendum would give the electorate a final say on whether or not the latest arrangements should be accepted, or whether the UK should remain in the EU after all. Their justification was that the EU referendum was a vote on the departure from the EU but not the destination.

I appreciate that there was uncertainty at the time of the referendum, in what a Leave vote would mean. But that uncertainty was built into the vote. If voters weren't content with level of certainty that was associated with a vote to leave, they were under no obligation to choose that option. There was no get-out clause

attached to the Leave option just like there was no get-out clause attached to the Remain option.

A vote to leave was a vote of trust in the government at the time to deliver on the result, according to the expectations, just before the referendum, of what each outcome would mean. So, again, if voters did not trust the Conservative government at the time to do what was in the UK's best interests, they were under no obligation to vote to leave. Unfortunately, though, FPTP meant that many voters voted to leave because there was much that they wanted to change in politics (that had little to do with the EU), and the referendum was their one chance, perhaps in a generation, to bring about meaningful change. But that problem, of disempowerment of the electorate, was not caused by the referendum, but instead by the absence of a PR voting system.

For those parties that seek to represent a majority of the UK by geographical area, and who are not the two dominant parties, FPTP makes it difficult for them to compete. So, they need a strategy. For them, concentrating support, both by area and by time, is crucial. If the hype generated by an event can be tapped into to gain a short-term boost in support—just long enough to get to the next general election—then that option is very attractive. The smaller parties that took up this second-referendum position may have done so out of principle, that they believed it was simply the right thing to do for the country. But if no party had had a principled position on this, there would still have been a big incentive for one of these smaller parties to take it up.

Why should parties have to consider compromising on their principles and ideologies to be in with a chance of winning support?

Strategies for those at the top

The Conservative and Labour parties know that most of the constituencies in the UK do not change hands easily. This means that their focus, not just during a general election campaign, but during the entire lifetime of a parliament (currently five years at most), is on those constituencies that could be won or lost: the marginal constituencies. When deciding on a campaign strategy for the 2017 UK general election, the Conservative and Labour parties would likely have used marginal constituencies from the previous election as a starting point. I previously defined a marginal

constituency as one in which was won by a margin of 15 % or less. At the 2015 general election, there were 57 such constituencies. But the two big parties' focus is yet further narrowed by the fact that they do not contest all of those 57 seats, as some are contested by the smaller parties. Looking at the figures, I see that, for the 57 marginal constituencies, the Conservative party finished first or second in 49 of them. The equivalent figure for the Labour party is 43.

Provided that the two big parties do not blunder, so that they do not lose big levels of support in a non-marginal constituency (but only those in which they were likely to win—the other votes are wasted anyway), they only need to focus their efforts on those constituencies that they are contesting. At the 2017 general election, once those contested marginal constituencies (as defined by the votes from the last general election) had been identified, latest public opinion could be gauged from many sources to confirm whether or not those constituencies were still contested. It would also be necessary to check whether any non-marginal constituencies had now *become* contested marginal constituencies.

Once the big two parties have identified contested marginal constituencies, their next focus is on swing voters within those constituencies. But not all swing voters count equally. Due to FPTP's winner-takes-all approach, support that can be won over from the contesting candidate count as double. This is because, if one is currently in second place, one of these votes not only takes oneself one step closer to the post (to use the FPTP metaphor), but it brings the post one step closer to oneself by reducing the contesting candidate's vote share. When defending a winning position, preventing a voter from defecting to this competitor also has a double effect in that it prevents the post moving closer to the contesting candidate at the same time as preventing that candidate getting closer to the post.

Parties understandably seek power to effect change. For the big two parties, how much their power changes is determined by a select few constituencies and, within those, focus is placed on key swing voters. So, even for the two big parties, there are incentives to concentrate their efforts on a select portion of the electorate. Should the UK use a voting system that incentivises this narrow approach?

FPTP is slow and cumbersome

Following general elections under PR voting systems, it can often take months for a government to form. It might seem like things are slower, more hesitant, and less functional than under FPTP. But the reality is the opposite: if no government can be formed, then that is a stark warning that the country is not ready to make policy decisions either. Conversely, following an election that uses a PR voting system, when a government *is* formed, that government knows where it stands, has confidence in its mandate, and is able to act decisively and responsibly. Although FPTP might seem like it is faster, the poor decisions made mean that, in the long run, FPTP is slow and cumbersome.

Under PR voting systems, politicians and prospective politicians have much more room to manoeuvre than they do under FPTP. Take France as an example. In April 2016, Macron launched the En Marche party. Just over one year later, he was the president of France. He was able to do this, not by working his way up an established order, but by founding his own political party. He gave the electorate of France an option that they would otherwise not have had.

FPTP empowers the press

Olivia is Noah's boss. Olivia tells Noah that, no-matter what he thinks about how best to do his job, he will always have to do it the same way. Would this give Noah an incentive to think for himself, or might he be more inclined to agree with Olivia's chosen method for the job? Olivia then has a change of approach. She now tells Noah that how he does his job is largely up to him, as long as the outcome is the same. The first approach discourages original, creative, and critical thinking, whereas the second approach does the opposite.

The same principle applies to the press. If one knows that one is not empowered to shape one's own country, one is more susceptible to just accept what one is told, i.e. to believe what the press produces. On the other hand, if one knows that, collectively with other citizens, one's future is determined by one's own views, then one cares much more about what those views are. One starts to care

more about thinking things through oneself, with a critical and balanced approach, because now it matters.

Free press plays an essential role in a democracy. The fact that the press is able to write what it wants (within reason) is a strength of the UK's democracy, not a weakness. The fact that the electorate is offered a wide range of sources of information is also a strength. The fact that the electorate has the freedom to choose what it reads, and how much weight to give each source of information, is also a strength. Using a voting system that discourages original, creative, and critical thinking is *not* a strength of the UK's democracy.

FPTP stifles competition

When one does not like a private service, one can vote with one's feet and take one's business elsewhere. This freedom of choice generates competition, which is central to capitalism. And capitalism has been the driving force behind many of the world's discoveries and inventions, improving health care, food production, education, communication, transportation etc. Capitalism rewards creativity, innovation, boldness, and progression. For this reason, it is understandable why people have chosen to enact and enforce laws to safeguard fair competition between entities in the business marketplace. FPTP, through its winner-takes-all approach, does not encourage competition: it stifles it.

Change starts at the top, but the top is controlled by wealth

I suspect that there are Britons up and down the country who go to work every day thinking this: I want to work hard and I want to pay taxes, but why should I have no meaningful say in the regulatory framework in which I work? If I'm lucky enough to live in a marginal constituency, I might be able to choose between two (rarely three) parties, but that's not real choice. I can see obvious improvements that can be made with the funding, laws, and regulations that determine how the industry in which I work functions, but my vote is meaningless.

To make matters worse, the UK's tax laws are heavily influenced, not by the will of the people, but by the UK's wealthy individuals and corporations. These laws, in turn, help them become wealthier, having yet more influence at the top.

In the public sector, bosses do the best with the framework in which they work. Their bosses do likewise. At the top is government, but, at present, government is not controlled by the people but by wealthy corporations, powerful lobby groups, trade unions and wealthy individuals. FPTP ensures that the real power lies in the hands of those who fund the government and opposition. The plan in this book aims to redress this imbalance, to put control back into the hands of the masses.

Conclusion

I would like to write that FPTP has served the UK well, and that it is the right time to move on. In reality, though, I would look back on FPTP as 130+ years of missed opportunity.

From the perspective of democracy, FPTP's only strength is its ease of processing. Going against it are unfairness, inequality, intolerance, wastefulness, division, and suppression. But if the arguments against FPTP are so strong, why has it lasted this long? And why does the voting system persist in so many countries across the world? The next chapter discusses this conundrum.

The First-Past-the-Post Conundrum

Lead-in

In the last chapter, I argued why FPTP should be replaced with a different voting system for UK general elections. The arguments that I made against FPTP are strong but, in my view, justified. But if FPTP really is as unfit for purpose as I have argued, why has it lasted this long in the UK? The UK is not alone in this conundrum; a further 59 of the world's 167 democracies use FPTP, including two OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. In this chapter I discuss why FPTP is difficult to displace, what efforts have been made across the world to do so, and what has worked.

When FPTP begins

To understand where FPTP gets its resoluteness and stubbornness, we need to understand the forces that are at work within a FPTP environment. I will call on another thought experiment to explain this, and it looks at what would happen if a PR voting system were replaced by FPTP for a country's general elections.

Let's imagine that a country uses a PR voting system for its general elections and has six political parties (from left to right, politically): one far-left-wing party, one left-wing party, one centre-left wing party, one centre-right wing party, one right-wing party, and one far-right-wing party. Now let's suppose that the nationwide support shares (by votes) for the parties are 5:15:30:30:15:5 respectively. Let's also suppose that this support is distributed roughly evenly across the country. Now the electorate chooses to replace the PR voting system with FPTP.

FPTP's winner-takes-all dynamic comes immediately into effect. From the self-interest perspective of a party, a party has much to gain by being a clear front-runner in any one constituency, because it would eliminate all competition. Since the support for the various parties is spread roughly evenly across the country, there

would be much to be gained by either a new party being founded that became a clear front-runner, or two or more parties merging to achieve the same effect. Since the nation's views are already represented by the six parties, any other party would not get anything like enough support to be a clear front-runner. So that leaves the incentive of mergers.

Parties would naturally merge with those that are closest to them in their ideologies. So, the far-left-wing party would not merge with the far-right-wing party. Even if they just agreed to disagree, the new bigger party would struggle to convince voters to vote for them. What about the far-left-wing party merging with the left-wing party? They might be close enough in their views, but the combined support share would only be 20 %, putting it nowhere close to being a clear front-runner. The same principles would apply to those parties on the right. The natural mergers, therefore, would either be the left-wing party with the centre-left wing party, or the equivalent on the right. The first two parties to merge in this way would have a vote share of 45 % compared to the next-best party on 30 %. This would make the resulting party a clear front-runner (15 percentage points and 50 % ahead of the next-best party), giving it a huge advantage over the rest of the field. Its support share would be 45 % but its seat share could end up being 100 % (with no opposition at all in the House of Commons). Let's say that a merger takes place between the left-wing party and the centre-left wing party, and that the resulting party calls itself the Lefties. The support shares are now 5:45:30:15:5.

Being fully aware of its unfair dominance, and of the risk of being challenged, might the Lefties try to consolidate their position further by merging with another party? Unlike monopolies in an unregulated business world, the Lefties can't see themselves doing this. They are already having to contend with managing the internal party dynamics of two opposing sets of beliefs, and they really couldn't see themselves functioning as a party if they merged with another party. So, they rule out another merger.

The winner-takes-all dynamic continues with the remaining parties. This is because the remaining parties, despite having a 55 % support share between them, would win few seats, if any. There is a strong incentive for each smaller party to merge with at least one other party, to try to become competitive again. Not only that, but there would be the added bonus that, once there are two parties that

are clear of the rest of the pack, tactical voting works in favour of those two bigger parties.

Let's take the reasons why the Lefties decided not to try to merge again, and generalise by stating that a party does not merge with a party that is more than one step away from it on the simplified left-right political spectrum that we're using. That leaves two possible remaining mergers: the centre-right wing party with the right-wing party; and the right-wing party with the far-right-wing party. The latter merger would achieve nothing useful, as the resulting party would only have a 20 % support share. That leaves the former merger, and let's call the resulting party the Righties.

There are now only four parties, and their support-share proportions are 5:45:45:5. Henceforth, despite the Lefties and Righties having internal party conflicts, they would have much to lose by reversing the steps that the dynamics of FPTP encouraged them to take. That is, they would each have much to lose by splitting into two separate parties. This setup, of having two big parties and the rest as smaller parties, represents a stable FPTP environment. The smaller parties can improve their chances by concentrating their efforts geographically, but they will always struggle to gain any significant seat share. Their best chance would be to wait until there is a hung parliament, then hope to be a kingmaker.

FPTP was adopted in the UK in 1884 with the passing of the Third Reform Act 1884. At that point, there were two dominant parties (Conservative and Liberal), and it was considered a privilege to be given a choice of these two. FPTP was therefore in this stable state from the outset, and people were generally content with it.

We've seen why FPTP evolves to a two-party political environment, but what stops the electorate reverting back to a PR voting system? The answer is that FPTP entrenches itself by means of a virtuous cycle (from the perspective of FPTP itself and those who support it) or a vicious cycle (from the perspective of anyone who wants change). Since latest UK polls suggest that the majority of the UK want a different voting system, I shall use the latter term.

The vicious FPTP cycle

FPTP makes it difficult to elect those who would do away with it. The UK version of this vicious cycle goes like this:

1. At a UK general election, the FPTP's winner-takes-all approach benefits the two dominant parties: Conservative and Labour. This ensures that they are either in government or in official opposition.
2. Legislation is driven by these two parties, one more so than the other, depending on which is in government and which is in opposition.
3. Large corporations, wealthy individuals, and trade unions, know this. They support one of these two parties financially to help them achieve power, so that the country's legislation is shaped in their favour. This naturally involves putting significant pressure on the party to keep FPTP.
4. To ensure that they remain competitive against the other party, these two dominant parties depend on this funding.
5. The culture within the two dominant parties is therefore to support keeping FPTP. In fact, ideally, the matter would not be debated at all. Individuals within these two parties who are against FPTP know that there is little to gain by speaking up about it, and much to lose in terms of career setbacks.
6. Those who openly support FPTP, or at least choose not to speak out about its inadequacies, are selected as constituency candidates, progress further within each party, and fill higher roles. This consolidates the FPTP culture.
7. At the next general election, the cycle repeats, thus reinforcing itself.

Many believe that the driving force behind this vicious cycle is not the funding of the two dominant parties, but instead their MPs. Many believe that the majority of Conservative and Labour MPs, when in private, support FPTP. But I don't believe this. I believe that the vast majority of Conservative and Labour MPs know, deep

within them, the damage that FPTP is doing to the UK, and privately wish it were gone. It might appear as if they are all in the game together, but that's only because they are making the most of a system that they, individually, are powerless to change. I do believe that, if the matter was taken out of their hands, and the system changed to a fairer, more competitive, and more progressive one, the majority of politicians from these two parties would be delighted. After all, it is a passion to change things for the better that entices would-be politicians into the profession, not a desire to alienate themselves from the country that they claim to love.

Those who would *not* be delighted with a PR voting system would be, of course, those companies, individuals, and trade unions who have, for decades, enjoyed favourable legislation. But they too would quickly adjust. And, in time, many of them would realise the benefits that a PR voting system would bring to the UK, not just the social side of it, but also the knock-on effect, in time, of consumer confidence and general wellbeing within the nation.

Of course, the Conservative and Labour parties would no longer enjoy the dominance that they currently enjoy, and many MPs would lose their roles. But for every Conservative and Labour seat lost, it would be gained by another party. And many might be better suited to another party anyway, e.g. UKIP for many Conservative MPs, and a new left-wing party for many Labour MPs. Any change of voting system would not decrease the number of roles on offer. In fact, I believe that politics in general would expand. The number of seats in the House of Commons would not necessarily change, but, as more of the public became engaged in politics, so would the demand increase for better representation. Not only that, but *all* parties would gain from a system that gives them power that they have fairly earned, and power that they are fully expected to use by the electorate.

Now that we understand the dynamics that are at work in the FPTP environment, we can start to look at how FPTP might be unravelled. To that end, I will now look into the mechanics of how FPTP might be replaced with another system.

Working backwards

I will now identify the key sequence of events that would bring about reform of the House of Commons voting system, working

back-to-front. If the electorate wanted to replace FPTP with a PR voting system, the end goal would clearly be to pass the necessary legislation. I will now discuss how an arbitrary piece of legislation is enacted, by working backwards from this end goal.

11. To enact a piece of legislation, an Act of Parliament is needed.

10. An Act of Parliament is born when a bill is granted Royal Assent.

9. A bill is granted Royal Assent when the monarch decides that a bill should be granted Royal Assent.

8. Although the decision of the monarch to grant a bill Royal Assent is, ultimately, down to the monarch, it is conventional that the monarch should, when passed a bill, grant that bill Royal Assent.

7. A monarch receives a bill when the House of Lords passes one to the monarch. In this case, the bill would have started in the House of Commons. This order may be reversed, but the procedure is similar. I will continue with the order House of Commons → House of Lords → Monarch.

6. The House of Lords passes a bill to the monarch for one of three reasons: (a) if it finds the House of Commons recommendations on the bill acceptable; (b) if one year has passed since it received the bill from the House of Commons; or (c) if the requirements of the Salisbury Convention are met, in which case the bill is passed to the monarch with only limited delay (more on this later).

5. I will start with 6 (a). For the House of Lords to find a House of Commons bill acceptable, the bill must pass through the House of Lords's various stages of scrutiny and voting. The scrutinising and voting is done by the members of the House of Lords, who are known as lords (also known as peers). Henceforth, I will use the term 'peer' instead of 'lord', as it seems to be the one that is more common. When I use 'peer' in this book, it will be in this specific sense, not the general one.

4. Whether or not a bill passes through the House of Lords depends on the political inclinations of the peers. This now needs further explanation.

Unlike the House of Commons, the House of Lords does not have a fixed number of members. There are currently (December 2017) 797 peers. This breaks down to: affiliated to a party (561 peers), crossbencher (184), non-affiliated—i.e. previously affiliated (28), and bishop (24). Unlike the House of Commons, members of the House of Lords are entitled to retain their seats for life. When a peer chooses to resign or retire (this was not even possible prior to 2014), or if a peer dies, what happens next depends on how that peer is classified. In addition to the above classifications, peers may be ‘life peers’ (682) or ‘hereditary peers’ (91) (the remaining 24 are the bishops). If a peer’s seat is vacated, and the peer was a hereditary peer, the seat is immediately filled by election by either some, or all, of the House of Lords peers, depending on the previous peer’s party affiliations. If the previous peer was a bishop (24), the Church of England appoints a peer to take his/her place. The seats of all other peers, if they resign, retire, or have the misfortune of dying, are not automatically filled. So, in theory, the House of Lords could have as few as 115 peers (according to existing legislation) if all the life peers’ seats were vacated. To recap, the only seats that must be filled, if vacant, are those belonging to hereditary peers (91) and bishops (24).

Are you still with me? If so, the question remains: how are the 682 life peers appointed? The answer requires another classification term: ‘party political’. Life peers (682) are either party political (503), crossbenchers (152), or non-affiliated (27). (Non-affiliated peers start off as party-political peers.)

So that narrows down the question to: how are party-political life peers and crossbench life peers appointed? As with House of Commons members, the answer is: by the monarch (although this is, by convention, a formality). Up to two crossbench life peers are nominated every year by the House of Lords Appointments Commission. The party-political life-peer nominations, however, are made by the government. Each year, the government decides how many nominations each party should be allowed to have, and the party leaders present their list of potential peers to the government.

Once the shortlists are in, the government then has the final say on which potential peers to nominate to the monarch.

If this all sounds confusing, that's because it is. And when I tried to get my head around it all, it seemed like I was reading a history book of 19th century Britain. I would write that I'm baffled that this institution has undergone such little reform over the last 100+ years, but, because of FPTP, I'm not. FPTP is a voting system that favours tradition and convention over bold thinking that keeps up with the times. I should make it clear that I respect and appreciate all the hard work that peers have done over the years, and much of it has been valuable. My problem with the House of Lords is not the individuals who work there, but how they came to *be* working there, i.e. how it's all set up.

Right, back to the steps to bring about voting reform. Were it not for what I'm about to write, and if we put aside the unlikely option of changing the political inclinations of existing peers, the upshot of all this would be that the only practical step that the electorate would be able to take to ensure that a bill passes through the House of Lords would be to have the government first appoint masses of peers that are affiliated to the party of government. As things stand, the Conservative party has 249 peers out of 797. So, for them to have a majority in the House of Lords, the government would need to appoint...300 Conservative peers and no others (I love a dose of algebra now and again!). But would the monarch approve of this influx of peers from the same party? On the face of it, the government would merely be trying to achieve a similar majority that it enjoyed in the House of Commons (if there was, indeed, a majority government). However, parliament and the monarchy, from what I gather, have a strong sense of tradition and convention, and doing something like flooding the House of Lords with members affiliated to only one party would likely be seen as an abuse of power. If consecutive governments did this, the number of peers could spiral out of control. Thankfully, there's another way to overcome the frustrations of the House of Lords.

[Parliaments Act 1949 enter the stage]

Regardless of the make-up of the House of Lords, the Parliaments Act 1949 prevents the House of Lords blocking a bill for more than

a year. (This expands on (b) of Step 6.) So, once the House of Commons passes a bill to the House of Lords, the House of Lords has up to one year to try to reach an agreement with the House of Commons on the bill. After that time, whatever has been agreed is then handed to the monarch regardless of the House of Lords's position. Were it not for what I'm about to write, this would mean that, no-matter how big an elected majority the governing party had in the House of Commons, it must be prepared to wait up to one year after it has passed a bill to the House of Lords for that bill to reach the monarch.

[Enter the Salisbury Convention]

The Salisbury Convention, if followed, ensures that a bill is only subject to reasoned amendments in the House of Lords, not wrecking amendments; and it ensures that the House of Lords does not try to vote down a bill. (This expands on (c) of Step 6.) But when does this convention apply? Simply put, the convention applies to bills that attempt to implement manifesto pledges. The principle behind the convention is very sensible, and it is that the will of the people should not be frustrated, by any means, let alone a legislature that is not elected by the people. The convention applies to majority governments, and it is not clear whether it would apply to a pledge that was made in a coalition partner's manifesto.

To summarise Step #4, peers are appointed for life, so, to alter the shape of the House of Lords, an elected governing party must either try to convert existing peers to its cause (slow and unlikely) or appoint masses of members affiliated to its party (unconventional and impractical). The Parliaments Act 1949 sought to resolve this issue, and ensures that, if the House of Commons hands a bill to the House of Lords, the House of Lords has up to one year to reach an agreement with the House of Commons or the bill will be handed to the monarch regardless. The process is less frustrating yet if the bill was pledged in the manifesto of the governing party of a majority government. In this scenario, if the Salisbury Convention is followed, the House of Lords shall not wreck or block the bill.

3. To ensure that a bill reaches the House of Lords, it must pass through the House of Commons.

2. To ensure that a bill passes through the House of Commons, it must be introduced by one of its members (i.e. an MP) and then pass through the House of Commons's various stages of scrutiny and voting.

1. To achieve Step #2, the majority of MPs must want the respective piece of legislation to be passed.

To recap, voting reform would require legislation, and enacting legislation would require the above essential sequence of steps. If Step #1 is essential, and if the current 650 MPs, on balance, do not want any one particular piece of legislation to be enacted, what can be done? The two options are:

1. Change the views of MPs.
2. Replace MPs.

#2 can be achieved by by-election or by general election. Given that a by-election is voluntary (resignation or retirement) or comes about by misfortune, the two options reduce to:

1. Change the views of MPs.
2. Replace MPs at a general election.

To conclude this sub-chapter, with the constitutional arrangement that exists in the UK at present, any democratic process that ends up bringing about reform of the House of Commons voting system would need to start with one of these two options. If necessary, the other option may be used in conjunction.

Change the views of MPs

The first option to bring about voting reform in the UK is to change the views of existing MPs. All parties other than the Conservative and Labour parties are in favour of giving the electorate a say on voting reform. So that leaves changing the views of the majority of Conservative and Labour MPs. The quickest (but not the easiest) way to change their views on voting reform would be to wait for their leaders to be replaced, then ensure that the new leader is one that supports voting reform. The reason why this would be effective is due to the pressure on MPs to conform to the political views of their party, and those views are, to a great extent, defined by the party leader. However, any leadership election would be brought about by luck, not by a systematic process. Not only that, but finding a prospective Conservative or Labour leadership contender who supported voting reform would be difficult enough, let alone managing to get them onto the ballot paper and persuading their members to vote them in as leader.

This sequence of events almost happened in 2015, when the outsider Jeremy Corbyn just made it onto the ballot paper of the leadership race, won the race, and became the most left-wing Labour leader in decades. Unfortunately, the final piece of the jigsaw was not in place, in that he did not support voting reform enough to pledge it in his 2017 manifesto.

Other than replacing a party's leader, another way to change the political views of existing MPs would be to apply public pressure. Voting-reform pressure groups/societies have existed in the UK since FPTP was adopted. In 1884, The Electoral Reform Society was founded as the Proportional Representation Society, and the society has been applying pressure on MPs to support voting reform ever since. Involve (.org.uk) has been campaigning since 2003, Unlock Democracy (.org) since 2007, and Make Votes Matter (.org.uk) and Pro PR since 2015. And there are many other charities and groups that support a move away from FPTP.

Another way to change the political views of MPs is for other MPs to apply pressure from within the House of Commons. In 2015, Jonathan Reynolds, an MP for Labour, introduced the 'Representation of the People (Proportional Representation) Bill'. In 2016, Caroline Lucas, an MP and co-leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, introduced the 'Electoral Reform Bill'. Both bills were defeated by the House of Commons.

Coalitions are another way to achieve the aim of this sub-chapter's title. If a hung parliament resulted in a potential kingmaker, that potential kingmaker can demand a referendum on voting reform as a prerequisite for a coalition government. Indeed, this did happen in the 2010 coalition negotiation between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties. The Liberal Democrat party did change the views of the Conservative MPs by getting them to pledge a referendum on voting reform. Back in 2011, however, the consensus of those who cast valid votes was that FPTP was preferable to AV. Coalitions, when they happen, are an effective way to bring about voting reform, but whether or not the results of a general election produce the right make up for the House of Commons is largely down to luck. If the practicalities of coordinating every vote in every constituency were realistic, it would be possible to ensure that the right hung parliament resulted. But if that were possible, so too would it be to elect a Liberal Democrat majority government, and one that would waste no time giving the electorate a choice on voting reform (or perhaps even pass the necessary laws without one, if public opinion was clear enough).

Petitions have also been tried. In April 2017, a six-month-long UK government petition entitled 'To make votes matter, adopt Proportional Representation for UK General Elections' ended with 103,495 signatures. This resulted in a three-hour-long debate in parliament on 30th October. The debate was lively and there were some excellent speeches in favour of voting reform. However, as expected by many, it did not result in any direct action.

Unfortunately, changing views of existing MPs can work against voting reform. In 1997, Labour won the general election with a large majority of seats. The party's manifesto pledged "We are committed to a referendum on the voting system for the House of Commons", only for his party to then renege on that commitment after his party had reaped the benefits of the FPTP system. In Canada, the Liberal party's 2015 manifesto stated: "We are committed to ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system" and "within 18 months of forming government, we will introduce legislation to enact electoral reform". After the election, the party reneged on that commitment after they had enjoyed a huge increase in support and a majority victory.

As I see it, trying to achieve Step #1 of the voting-reform process by trying only to change the views of MPs is not an optimal approach to take. There are many pressure groups that have tried, and are trying, to achieve this. However, these efforts will always be applied in an arena that is dominated by tradition, wealth, and vested power. With this approach, it will always be the decisions of MPs, and therefore the decisions of powerful corporations, unions, and lobby groups, who will decide matters. Instead, the optimal strategy would be one that used the power of the vote, not that of the pound, to bring about change, i.e. to dictate the terms by which change would happen. Those terms would be such that the message to MPs would be this: if you don't decide to hold a referendum on voting reform by the next general election, the electorate will take matters out of your hands and achieve that goal themselves; it is therefore in your best interests to be seen as contributors to the process of holding this referendum, not victims of it. It would be this approach that would apply maximum pressure to MPs, and this leads us to the second option.

Replace MPs at a general election

The second option available to bring about voting reform in the UK is to replace those MPs who do not support voting reform with those MPs who do. This faces a different set of challenges. Although UK general elections come around every five years (according to current legislation), the FPTP winner-takes-all approach means that the vast majority of candidates who will be elected to become MPs will be affiliated with the Conservative and Labour parties, for reasons I have explained. And, because of the pressures within those parties, FPTP-supporting candidates will have been selected by their parties over those who do not support FPTP. Under FPTP, it is a continuous uphill struggle to get sufficient voting-reform-supporting MPs from the two big parties elected in one go, to be able to push the necessary bill through the House of Commons. And, for reasons of tactical voting, voting enough smaller-party MPs into power at the same time is also hugely challenging.

There was a chance, at the 2010 UK general election, of electing Labour MPs who supported a referendum on voting reform. Gordon Brown pledged a referendum on replacing FPTP with AV in Labour's manifesto, although this would have had nothing like the

same benefits as a PR voting system. As it turned out, the resulting Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition effected that referendum anyway. It should also be pointed out, though, that had Labour won that 2010 election with a majority, there would have been no guarantee that it would not have reneged on its referendum commitment, as it did under Tony Blair in 1997.

There were other phases in the UK's history when voting reform might have happened. In 1931, Labour and the Liberal parties worked together to try to pass a bill on replacing FPTP with AV, but the bill was lost when the parties lost power. In the 1970s, the Conservatives played with the idea of voting reform because FPTP facilitated the election of two successive Labour governments. Later, in the 1980s, it was Labour that considered voting reform after they, themselves, were frustrated to see successive Conservative majority governments elected on vote shares of less than 44 %.

I have come across one notable success story in moving away from FPTP: New Zealand. This is a summary of that story. In the 1970s and 1980s, FPTP was used at general elections and the two dominant parties were National and Labour. The 1978 and 1981 general elections returned majority National governments on less than a 40 % vote share, and with a *lower* vote share than Labour. This led Labour to pledge a royal commission on electoral reform in its 1984 manifesto. Labour then won that election and the resulting commission proposed replacing FPTP with the 'mixed member proportional' (MMP) system (known as 'additional member system' in the UK). A lobby group called the Electoral Reform Coalition upped the pressure on Labour to take further action, and Labour pledged a referendum on voting reform in its 1987 manifesto. It won but then reneged on its commitment. Before the next general election, Labour submitted a private member's bill (i.e. by a backbencher) to force a binding referendum, but the motion was defeated. Fortunately, National chose to use Labour's poor record on voting reform as a means to win votes, and pledged a non-binding referendum in their 1990 manifesto. They won the election with a landslide, and the resulting 1992 referendum, followed by a 1993 binding referendum, resulted in FPTP being replaced with MMP.

The New Zealand story is one of success, but it only worked because both the two dominant parties made voting reform a topic of debate at the right times. Had they, between them, adopted an optimal strategy (from their point of view), they could have

continued to monopolise the New Zealand political landscape. As hopeful as the New Zealand story is, it strikes me as having depended on a healthy slice of luck. Unfortunately, the UK has not had that slice of luck. The Conservative and Labour parties are fully aware of the huge role that FPTP plays in boosting their powers, and, as things stand, they show no intention of using voting reform as a means to win support.

Of the two options to achieve Step #1 above (i.e. have a majority of MPs support giving the electorate a say on voting reform), this option of replacing MPs at a general election is the most appealing. It does not depend on the decisions made by MPs, but instead the decisions made by the electorate.

Conclusion

In New Zealand, due to a combination of events spanning 15 years, legislation was passed to convert from FPTP to another voting system. Due to the way the 2010 UK general election went, the Liberal Democrat party became a kingmaker and gave the UK electorate a referendum on replacing FPTP with AV. These examples prove that it *is* possible for the electorate to move away from FPTP as the system of choice for its general elections. But what is certain about both of them is that they did not result from a sustained, systematic approach, that was entirely dependent on the electorate.

It might seem like there is no way to crack the UK FPTP nut in this systematic way, but there *are* levers of power that are available to the people with which to do this. In the next chapter, I present a plan, not to politicians, but to the electorate of the UK. The plan's aim is to give the UK electorate a meaningful say in replacing FPTP with a PR voting system to ensure that, if the electorate so wishes, all MPs in the House of Commons have been elected by a PR voting system by the end of 2022.

The Snap Election Plan

Lead-in

I have argued why FPTP should be replaced, and I have illustrated what obstacles exist in doing this. In this chapter, I suggest how the electorate might overcome those obstacles so that, through a sustained and systematic effort, they are able to replace FPTP if they so wish. I first present the plan and then answer questions that might be asked.

The plan in 7 steps

The following steps outline the snap election plan. (I use lower case for the plan itself and *The Snap Election Plan*, or The Snap Election Plan when written by hand, for the book.) The time between each step should be kept to a minimum. I have written the 7 steps as if the plan has sufficient support. Later in this chapter, I answer questions that might be asked.

1. Register the Snap Election Party (SEP).
2. Stand 650 candidates at the next UK general election.
3. Win a majority of seats at the next UK general election.
4. Form a caretaker government that is accountable to the SEP.
5. Hold a binding referendum, asking which one of the following four voting systems should replace FPTP for UK general elections: Additional Member System; Closed Party List; Open Party List; Single Transferable Vote.
6. Legislate for the replacement of FPTP with the electorate's choice of voting system.
7. Trigger a snap general election in accordance with the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

Step 1: Register

Register a political party (the name ‘Snap Election Party’ is used here) with the Electoral Commission for both the Great Britain and Northern Ireland registers. The party should have the following aim:

If the United Kingdom electorate so wishes, hold a UK general election using a proportional-representation voting system by the end of the year 2022.

To achieve this aim, the party should have the following two pledges, which it would implement if it was given sufficient influence in the House of Commons to do so:

1. Hold a binding referendum on the following question: Which one of the following four voting systems should replace First Past the Post for UK general elections? Additional Member System; Closed Party List; Open Party List; Single Transferable Vote.
2. Hold a snap general election using the electorate’s choice of voting system.

The barrier to entry to register a political party is, naturally, low. To get started, a £150 fee is payable to the Electoral Commission. Also, the party needs a constitution and a financial scheme. There are several helpful guidance documents available from the Electoral Commission for registering and running a political party.

Step 2: Stand

Now prepare for the next general election. Generate awareness of the Snap Election Party (SEP). Raise funds. Build trust with the electorate. Ready enough candidates (plus a standby list) to stand one candidate in each constituency at the election. (As of December 2017, there are 650 constituencies.)

Keep on top of regulatory and legal requirements of running a political party. Run the party as leanly and efficiently as possible. At the same time, make full use of all resources available to the party to

ensure that, at the next general election, every UK voter is aware of the SEP and what a vote for the party would mean.

When choosing candidates to stand in the 650 constituencies, set the following as application requirements:

1. Legally entitled to stand as candidate.
2. Deposit, payable upfront.
3. Loyal and committed to the snap election plan.

The value of the deposit would be what the Electoral Commission requires for a candidate to stand. As of December 2017, it is £500. If the rules remain unchanged, each candidate would have his/her deposit returned if he/she got more than 5 % of valid votes cast in the constituency in which he/she stood.

For #3, experience in voting-reform societies and/or pressure groups should hold weight.

Once the above three requirements have been met, the following two criteria would be used:

1. Does the applicant live in the constituency in which he/she intends to stand?
2. What knowledge, experience and skills does the applicant have in relation to UK politics and law?

For the first of these two criteria, although it is not a legal requirement for candidates to live in the constituency in which they intend to stand, it is preferable for the SEP to allocate candidates in this way to help build trust with the electorate. In terms of the SEP's two pledges, however, it would make no difference whether a constituency's SEP MP lived in the constituency or not.

The second criterion is beneficial in that the combined knowledge, experience and skills of SEP candidates would be helpful during the campaign. The same would apply to those candidates who then become MPs, in navigating parliament.

The public needs to know more details about how each of the four voting system options would be implemented. Work this out prior to the general election and make the information public.

A snap general election could be called at any time, and the SEP needs to be ready. Dissolution of parliament would occur 25

working days before any planned snap general election. Prior to that, allow two working days for prorogation. Prior to that, allow two working days for the necessary House of Commons vote. That gives the SEP at least 29 working days' notice for a snap general election. Thorough and timely preparation are essential.

Prepare to win. Ensure that a network of people is in place so that, if the SEP's plan does progress as intended, the SEP has access to the necessary experience and expertise to see the plan through.

Step 3: Win

Win a majority of seats at the next UK general election, and a majority of votes. The majority of seats is needed to command a majority of the House of Commons with which to implement the party's two pledges. The majority vote share is needed, not out of necessity, but out of principle. The principle is that, if FPTP is going to be replaced by another voting system, that reform should have the backing of the electorate. In practice, this means a majority of those who cast valid votes.

Step 4: Form

Form a caretaker government. If the SEP wins a majority of seats, the SEP leader should ask the incumbent prime minister if he/she would accept a role as deputy prime minister, accountable to the SEP. The SEP leader should then work with the deputy prime minister to seek the support of the incumbent cabinet with which to form a caretaker government. The UK's loyal civil service would be in place as usual. Should any of these proposals be rejected, seek to fill these roles with those politicians who have the most recent and relevant experience of governing the UK. Once these roles have been provisionally agreed, seek the approval of the monarch for the deputy prime minister and his/her provisional cabinet to form a caretaker government that is accountable to the SEP. The SEP leader would take the title of prime minister.

The caretaker government would have no MPs of its own, and would therefore have no power in itself. The caretaker government would play a crucial role in managing the needs of the UK while the

pledges of the SEP are implemented. The SEP would oversee all decisions made by the caretaker government and, if necessary, the SEP would intervene.

While a caretaker government is in place, should the SEP need to make any decisions in the House of Commons beyond its SEP pledges, these should be made in counsel with the caretaker government. Any decisions made by the SEP beyond its pledges should aim to keep the UK running as smoothly as possible while its pledges are implemented as swiftly as possible.

Step 5: Hold

Hold a binding referendum according to the SEP's first pledge, as stated in Step #1. The wording of the question and possible options would be subject to the Electoral Commission's approval.

Step 6: Legislate

Use the SEP's majority in the House of Commons to legislate for the replacement of FPTP with the electorate's choice of voting system. The SEP should refer to the Salisbury Convention to push legislation through the House of Lords if necessary. The final say on the legislation would be by the monarch in deciding whether to grant Royal Assent.

Step 7: Trigger

Trigger a snap general election in accordance with the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011. Firstly, hold a vote in the House of Commons to seek the necessary 2/3 supermajority. Failing this, hold a vote of no confidence in the SEP caretaker government, and have the SEP MPs vote against themselves.

How did you choose the four referendum options?

I wanted the ‘additional member system’ (AMS) and ‘single transferable vote’ (STV) system to be options because they are already used in the UK and would therefore already be familiar to many Britons. The other two options are commonly used PR voting systems. In fact, where AMS is used in the UK, it uses the Closed Party List system for its list seats.

How might the four referendum options be implemented?

Additional Member System

This system is already used for the London Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, and the Welsh Assembly.

The UK could be divided into 325 constituencies (existing constituency boundaries could be used). Each constituency would elect one MP using FPTP. The remaining 325 seats could be distributed amongst the UK’s 12 regions (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and nine in England) proportionally, according to each region’s electorate size. These seats could then be filled using a Closed Party List system in combination with the modified D’Hondt method.

Although this system is a hybrid of FPTP and a PR system, if the ratio of list seats to constituency seats is sufficiently high (e.g. 50:50), and the list regions are big enough, proportionality is

typically very good. For this reason, this book considers it a PR voting system. And the SEP would consider it one too.

Closed Party List

The 650 seats could be distributed amongst the UK's 12 regions in proportion to each region's electorate size. Parties would present a list of candidates to the electorate. The order would be fixed. So, for example, if the electorate decided to elect eight candidates from one particular party, the top eight candidates from that party's list would be elected. Voters would then vote for a party's list, and how many seats each party wins could be decided using the D'Hondt method.

Open Party List

This would be similar to the Closed Party List option in that parties would present a list of candidates to the electorate. The UK would need to be divided into more regions than 12. There could be, for example, 36 regions, with each having an average of 18 seats. These smaller regions would be necessary because there would now need to be enough space on each ballot paper for one list for *each* party, with each list comprising the respective party's candidates. Voters would then choose a candidate, not a party. The vote for the candidate would count, first and foremost, as a vote for that candidate's party. Then, when it has been decided how many seats each party should be awarded, seats for each party are filled according to candidate vote shares within the party.

Single Transferable Vote

This system is already used for the Northern Ireland Assembly, Northern Ireland councils, and Scotland councils. The UK could be divided up into, say, 160 constituencies, with each having three, four, or five seats. Voters in each constituency would then rank as many candidates as they wanted, and these rankings would then be used to elect candidates for that constituency.

Would you consider using the Webster/Sainte-Laguë method instead of the D'Hondt method?

Since seats are not divisible, there needs to be a method that is used that takes a set of votes and uses those votes to allocate seats proportionally (or as proportionally as possible). STV asks voters to rank candidates, and it uses these rankings to allocate seats. The other three voting systems just ask for one vote per voter (for the list seats), so need to use a different method. There are several options available, and two of the most common are the D'Hondt method and the Webster/Sainte-Laguë method.

I prefer the Webster/Sainte-Laguë method as it is more neutral than the D'Hondt method, which has a slight bias towards bigger parties. However, the priority of the snap election plan is not to achieve perfection in one step, but to ensure that the first step happens at all. Given that the D'Hondt method is already in use in the UK, the SEP will stick with it. Of course, any number of changes would be possible once the first step of voting reform has been achieved.

What if the Snap Election Party does not win a majority of seats in the House of Commons?

If the Snap Election Party (SEP) does not win a majority of seats, there are four possibilities:

1. Another party has won a majority of seats. SEP wins seats.

The SEP would likely have no further influence, although the party in power might decide to hold a voting-reform referendum anyway (depending on how much support the SEP was given at the election). Once the likelihood became a certainty, that the SEP MPs would have no further influence, the SEP MPs would immediately resign.

2. Hung parliament. SEP wins seats and is one of the bigger parties.

The SEP should try to form a coalition with one or more parties that supports voting reform. The other parties may agree to the referendum, but not the snap general election. The SEP might even have to compromise on the referendum version itself, to restrict the electorate to more limited options, or even to not offer any PR options at all, e.g. just AV. From the SEP's point of view, this would be far from ideal, but the SEP would take a pragmatic—as opposed to an idealistic—approach, in that it would push ahead with as much or as little as it would be able to achieve. Essentially, any one of a number of different scenarios could play out.

If a snap general election is not agreed, the SEP MPs would resign their roles once voting-reform legislation was in place. At that point, any coalition might fall apart due to the SEP's absence. Might that deter other parties going into coalition with the SEP? This is a possibility, but any smaller party that the SEP goes into coalition with would likely have a better chance of success under a different voting system anyway, so the incentive to form a temporary coalition could be strong.

The SEP's coalition partner(s) would likely form the government, be it a caretaker one or one with the intention to govern for the full lifetime of the parliament.

Essentially, the SEP's goal would be to find one or more partners to be able to implement as much of its two pledges as possible.

3. Hung parliament. SEP wins seats and is one of the smaller parties.

Realistically, if the SEP is one of the smaller parties, then either the Conservative party, the Labour party, or both parties, would dominate any possible coalition. In this case, try to use whatever negotiating position the SEP has to persuade the bigger party/parties that giving the electorate a choice on voting reform is in the best interests of the country.

4. SEP wins no seats.

Look at the SEP's vote share. The SEP won no seats, so it is likely that its vote share was low. However, in the highly unlikely event that the SEP's vote share is close to 50 %, try to persuade those in power to hold a referendum on voting reform that offers a PR option.

What if the SEP does not win a majority of votes?

If the electorate chooses not to give the Snap Election Party (SEP) a majority vote share, any voting-reform referendum that the SEP is able to bring about would, in addition to giving the electorate at least one alternative to FPTP, ask the electorate whether they wanted to change the voting system at all. If the majority of all valid votes cast indicated that change was not wanted, all second answers would play no further part and FPTP would remain the voting system for UK general elections.

What would stop further voting reform, back to FPTP?

Legislation is reversible in the UK. If it were not, the UK would not be a democracy. In theory, any future parliament could pass legislation that brought back FPTP, and this could be done without first holding a referendum on the matter. But the same principles would apply to any legislation that was reversed. If the electorate did not want that reversal, they would likely feel betrayed by the parties that made it happen. If it did happen, though, the SEP model would always be available to be used again if necessary, with only months being wasted before a new general election is held.

If the SEP is unable to bring about a snap general election, at what point would its MPs resign?

If, after the next general election, a snap general election is planned—either by the SEP’s own efforts or as part of a deal—SEP MPs would retain their seats until the dissolution of parliament for that election.

For all other cases, the SEP’s MPs would resign as soon as it became clear that they would have no further influence in the House of Commons. This outcome could materialise if the electorate rejected voting reform in a referendum. Or once voting-reform legislation had been enacted, if that was the electorate’s will from the referendum.

SEP MPs would not retain their seats merely to put pressure on other parties not to reverse voting-reform legislation. In the very unlikely event that this occurred, the SEP model could be re-used.

Would the resignation of SEP MPs trigger by-elections?

SEP MPs would be committed to resigning when required. However, what is not guaranteed is whether or not all of the resulting vacancies (i.e. seats in the House of Commons) would be filled before the next general election.

When a House of Commons seat is vacated, for whatever reason, it is for the House of Commons to decide (by vote) whether that seat should be filled during the lifetime of the parliament. If the SEP had a majority of seats in the House of Commons, then, in theory, SEP MPs could resign, one at a time, so that remaining SEP MPs could guarantee at least some by-elections. The number of guaranteed by-elections would be according to the formula $((\text{majority} \times 2) - 1)$. For example, if the SEP had 327 seats (majority of 2), 3 by-elections would be guaranteed. This exercise is likely to be academic, however, as it is unlikely that the House of Commons would choose not to fill a vacant seat so early in the lifetime of a parliament.

What would stop parliament enacting laws to thwart the SEP's efforts?

Recent polls indicate that a majority of the UK electorate supports voting reform. If there has not been a huge shift in thinking over the last few years, a majority of MPs, however, do *not* support voting reform. For evidence, we need look no further than the voting down of voting-reform bills by the House of Commons in recent years. So, if the polls are accurate, MPs, on balance, are clearly not representing those who support them on the subject of voting reform. Even if the polls were not accurate, given that the voting system forms the bedrock of the UK's democracy, if there is any doubt, should it be incumbent on MPs to put the question to the electorate? It is understandable, that on the policy of voting reform, there is this mismatch between the representatives and the represented. As discussed earlier, there is great pressure on the two big parties to keep FPTP.

Given this pressure from wealthy corporations, lobby groups etc., would MPs make further efforts to block attempts to give the electorate a meaningful say on the matter? If the snap election plan started to gain momentum, might MPs try to thwart it? An example of how they might try to do this would be to amend the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 so that snap general elections would be no longer possible, or only possible in more exceptional circumstances. Although politicians could pursue this option, as well as many others, they would only do so if, on balance, it would be worthwhile. But what would the downside be? In one word, trust.

The success and failure of any one party is based on trust. If the electorate loses trust in a political party, that party would lose power. That's because when the electorate chooses representatives, it chooses them to, well, represent them. The example of amending the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 could, for example, abuse trust in the vast majority of the electorate, if the move was seen to be anti-democratic.

Whatever legislation might be passed, or whatever other attempts parties and politicians might make, to thwart the snap election plan, it is important to remember that, although the fundamentals of the snap election plan are fixed, the SEP would be able, prior to the general election, to add to the plan if necessary. For example, the SEP could add to its plan the reversal of these blocking

efforts before continuing with its original plan. With the example given above, of snap general elections being outlawed, the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 could be reinstated as the SEP's first task after winning power, thus reinstating the possibility of snap general elections. Of course, the SEP would state any additional pledges in its manifesto, which would be for the electorate to decide whether or not to support at the ballot box.

At what point would the SEP de-register itself as a political party?

There are several scenarios that could play out that would result in the SEP de-registering itself as a political party with the Electoral Commission. The following is a list of all these scenarios, in order of how soon they could materialise, starting with the soonest:

1. There is initial public support for the registering of the SEP. However, after the SEP has been registered, public support dwindles.
2. The House of Commons has a change of tune, and wants to give the electorate a choice on voting reform. MPs vote in favour of a referendum that gives the electorate an option for a PR voting system. The electorate votes in favour of keeping FPTP.
3. At the referendum mentioned above, the electorate votes in favour of the change, and parliament then passes the necessary legislation to ensure that the next general election is conducted using this new system.
4. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins no seats.
5. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins insufficient seats to strike a deal on voting reform, and insufficient seats to persuade other parties to give the electorate a say on voting reform. SEP MPs resign.
6. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins insufficient seats to strike a deal on voting reform. However, due to its sizeable support

base, it is able to persuade those in positions of power to give the electorate a say on voting reform. To hold those parties to account, the SEP MPs retain their seats until either the electorate has voted against change, or voting-reform legislation is in place. SEP MPs resign.

7. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins enough seats to strike a deal on voting reform. At the referendum, the electorate votes against voting reform. SEP MPs resign.

8. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins enough seats to strike a deal on voting reform. The deal does not include a snap general election. At the referendum, the electorate votes in favour of voting reform. The SEP assists in passing the necessary legislation. SEP MPs resign.

9. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins a majority of seats but not votes. At the referendum, the electorate votes against reform. SEP MPs resign.

10. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins a majority of seats and votes. The SEP honours its pledges. Parliament is dissolved prior to the snap general election.

11. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins a majority of seats but not votes. The electorate votes for change. The SEP implements its pledges. Parliament is dissolved prior to the snap general election.

12. At the next UK general election, the SEP wins enough seats to strike a deal on voting reform. The deal includes a snap general election. The electorate votes in favour of reform at the referendum. The SEP assists in passing the necessary legislation. Parliament is dissolved prior to the snap general election.

For Scenario #2, politicians might pledge a referendum, then renege on that pledge. Or there might be insufficient time left in this parliament's lifetime. So, to ensure that there is a fall-back option, the SEP would only de-register itself once the referendum had taken place. For Scenario #3, the SEP would only de-register itself once the voting-reform legislation had been passed, for the same reason.

It is possible that either the Conservative party or the Labour party (or both) pledges a voting-reform referendum in their next manifesto. Although this would be a welcome recognition of the need to give the electorate a say on voting reform, it would not, in itself, affect the SEP's position for the following reasons:

- Manifesto commitments are not binding.
- Whether or not manifesto commitments are honoured would only be known *after* the next general election, thus missing the opportunity to implement the snap election plan.
- If a voting-reform-supporting party won power and wanted to see out the full lifetime of the next parliament, the electorate would have to wait up to five further years to be able to elect MPs using the replacement voting system.
- If voters wanted to support the voting-reform-supporting party, voters would have to vote for all the party's *other* policies, which would be implemented for up to five years up to the next general election.

In summary, the SEP would de-register itself once legislation was in place for a new voting system, or once the SEP no-longer had sufficient public support, either directly or because it was clear that the electorate did not want to replace FPTP.

What would happen to the SEP's assets when it de-registered itself?

Even after the SEP de-registered itself as a political party, it would still be accountable to the Electoral Commission for up to two years thereafter (according to current legislation). During that phase, the SEP would need to cover minimal running costs, and it would retain sufficient assets to do this. All other assets, at that point of de-registration, as well as all assets after the reporting phase has finished, would be transferred (or liquidated and then transferred) to the Electoral Reform Society to support them in their ongoing work to improve the UK's democracy.

What definition of 'PR voting system' are you working to?

In Step #1 of the plan I use the term 'proportional-representation voting system'. To specify exactly what that means would require me to go through every voting system and every possible way that it could be applied to the UK. Essentially, though, what it means is that the number of seats that each party receives is roughly proportional to how many votes they won, and that the system *guarantees* this.

It is not just the type of system that is used that determines its proportionality, but also how it is implemented. For example, the AMS system could be used, and it could be implemented such that there are 20 constituencies, 1 region, and 10 list seats for the region. This system would not be considered proportional because, to be guaranteed good proportionality, the ratio of list seats to constituency seats should be roughly 50:50 or higher.

Having a ratio of list seats to constituency seats of 50:50 or higher does not, however, guarantee proportionality. Take this example. An AMS system could be used that has 20 constituencies, 10 regions, and 20 list seats, with 2 list seats for each region. This would have a 50:50 ratio of list seats to constituency seats, but it would not be considered proportional because the number of list seats per region would be too small. For example, if the list votes in every region were split between four parties in the proportions 34:34:32:0, the party that ended up with a 32 % vote share across the country might end up without a single seat. This scenario is taken to the extreme intentionally, to illustrate the concept of an effective threshold.

What makes you think you would be able to convince the electorate to vote for the SEP?

Recent polls indicate that the majority of the UK public wants to reform the House of Commons voting system, and I believe that the polls are accurate. But the question remains: why would the UK public choose the snap-election-plan option to achieve it? I am under no illusion that communicating the snap election plan to the UK at large, and building enough trust with the electorate to

convince them to vote for this new party, would be straightforward. It would take a clear, consistent, and simple message. It would take fundraising and publicity, and it would take good organisation and planning.

Despite these challenges, I fully believe that the plan is achievable and, if taken one step at a time, very much a practical solution to achieving voting reform. The plan has the following selling points:

1. The plan is democratic, inclusive, and progressive.
2. The plan is simple, practical, and achievable.
3. The plan is controlled, 100 %, by the electorate, and does not depend on existing politicians or parties.
4. The plan, if sufficiently supported, would achieve results quickly.
5. The plan maximises the chance of support for it at the ballot box being rewarded.

The reasons for #5 are:

- (a) A vote for the party would be concentrated on one policy only.
- (b) If the SEP was able to bring about a snap general election, it would give voters another chance to vote.
- (c) Any SEP MPs unable to assist in achieving the SEP's pledges would resign, very likely giving each of those constituencies a by-election.
- (d) Even if a vote for the SEP did not result in an SEP MP, a high vote share could still contribute to the snap election plan.

Why should I vote for the SEP when I might risk wasting my vote?

This question would be crucial in building support. I am taking 'wasting' in this context to mean 'not contributing to the election of a candidate'. But if we redefine 'wasting' as 'missing an opportunity to support a plan to bring about change that the UK desperately needs', would a vote for any party other than the SEP, or no vote at all, be a wasted vote/missed opportunity?

Furthermore, the following points come to mind:

- At the last UK general election, each voter was, statistically, 68.4 % likely to cast a vote that made no difference to the outcome of seat allocations. At the 2015 election, the figure was 74.3 %. So, if you don't vote for the SEP, your vote would anyway be around 70 % likely to have no impact.
- If the SEP won your seat, it is very likely that you would get *another* chance to vote within months of the general election, either in a snap general election or in a by-election.
- If you voted for the SEP, and your SEP candidate did not win the seat, your vote could still play a part in the SEP's plan, in that the SEP would need a majority vote share, either in the general election, or in a subsequent referendum, to go ahead with voting reform.

FPTP benefits the party that I'm loyal to, so why would I want to change the system?

There may be loyal Conservative and Labour supporters who hear about this plan and think, if FPTP benefits the party that I support, why should I support changing the system to something else? This is a reasonable question to ask, and I would answer it with the following points.

Firstly, I actually believe that the vast majority of Conservative and Labour MPs, when behind closed doors, *want* FPTP replaced with a PR voting system. But they realise that speaking up about it is likely to achieve little and, if anything, hamper (or worsen) their careers. So, I do believe that you would actually be doing your party a favour by supporting voting reform. Once a new system is in place—and this would only likely take several months following a general election—you could then continue to being loyal to whichever party you wanted to be loyal to.

Secondly, if you are loyal to the Conservative or Labour parties, you are actually being loyal to two contrasting ideologies. The Conservative party is composed of Eurosceptics and Europhiles, and the Labour party of left-wing (traditional Labour) and centre-left (New Labour) politicians. When you support the party with your vote, you are supporting both of those ideologies. So, although your party might be getting more power with FPTP, that power is anyway shared between the differing ideologies in the party. By using a PR

voting system instead of FPTP, all parties would be able to compete equally, and there would be nothing to be gained by politicians of differing ideologies cramming into one party. This additional choice of party would then allow your support to be focused on a party that was clear about what it stood for.

Thirdly, let's imagine that the Conservative and Labour party politicians were, even in private, in *favour* of FPTP. And let's assume that each of these two parties *does* have a clear vision and ideology. It might now seem like an obvious decision not to support voting reform. It might even feel like a betrayal of your party to do the opposite of what would help them win power. But here's the thing. What's the purpose of a political party? Are parties accountable to the people or are the people accountable to the parties? If your party expects your loyalty, would you not expect your party to be loyal to you too? And, if your party continued to mislead you in the face of overwhelming evidence, would they still be showing loyalty to you, in representing your interests? If your party tells you that winning power, at whatever cost, is more important than freedom, cohesion, justness, equality, choice, respect, tolerance, collaboration, and peace, is that party one that you want to be loyal to? I hope that this book will help all loyal Conservative and Labour party supporters make an informed decision on this.

The party that I'm loyal to already supports voting reform, so why should I vote for the SEP?

For those parties that support voting reform, they can be divided into two broad categories: (1) those that seek to represent a majority of the UK and (2) those that seek to represent a minority of the UK. Those that fall into Category #1 are parties like the Liberal Democrat party, the Green Party of England and Wales, and UKIP. Parties that fall into Category #2 are parties like the SNP, the DUP, Sinn Féin, and Plaid Cymru.

For those parties in Category #1, they would benefit hugely from having a PR voting system in place. So, the best way to be loyal to them would be to vote for the SEP at the next UK general election. In the past, it seems that smaller parties have been reluctant to commit to pacts with other parties. This is understandable, as

committing to any pact that ends up not working out could risk losing core supporters. For similar reasons, smaller parties may be reluctant to support the SEP, but, as with many Conservative and Labour politicians, I suspect that, in private, they would be wishing for the SEP's success.

Those parties that fall into Category #2 often benefit from FPTP, in that, within their own geographical area, they are one of two front-runners. They often benefit, at a regional level, from all those things discussed in this book that the Conservative and Labour parties benefit from at a national level. At the 2017 general election, the SNP, for example, won 37 % of all valid votes cast in Scotland, and were awarded 59 % of Scotland's 59 seats. On a national level, this translated to a vote share of 3.0 % and a seat share of 5.4 %. Yet, despite being benefactors of the system, the SNP still supports replacing FPTP with a PR voting system, as do all the other smaller parties that are currently represented in the House of Commons.

Voting for the SEP at the next UK general election would not be showing disloyalty to one of these Category #2 parties. By voting for the SEP, you would be supporting the implementation of one of your party's policies. And it is this *one* policy that underpins all the others, and gives the implementation of all the other policies *legitimacy*. Once the SEP has done its job, voters may then continue to be loyal to their party by voting for that party at the snap general election.

Why should I trust that the SEP would honour its pledges?

When the Conservative and Labour parties gain power, they do not always honour the pledges that they made in their manifestos. Since they have a big agenda, they can push certain pledges further down the list of priorities. However, the SEP would only have two pledges. Any attempt by the SEP to not honour its pledges, or to not conduct itself according to the expectations of the electorate, would be immediately obvious and a flagrant breach of trust. Pressure on the SEP from politicians and the public to stand down would be immense.

What about the pledges of individual SEP MPs? Firstly, of the applicants who are eligible to stand as candidates and able to raise

the deposit money, they would be selected, first and foremost, based on their commitment and loyalty to the SEP's cause. Those SEP candidates who then became MPs would have been elected according to the SEP manifesto. So, what would SEP MPs have to gain by reneging? Their constituents would not want to be represented by them, they would have no respect in the House of Commons, and their reputation would be damaged.

In essence, there would be far more to be gained by the SEP and its MPs honouring their pledges than not doing so.

When should this plan be started?

The short answer is: as soon as possible. With the next general election currently planned for 5th May 2022, some might ask why the SEP should be registered now. The reason for this is that a snap general election could be triggered at any time before then. From online research, it appears as if the most likely year for the next UK general election is 2018, followed closely by 2019 and 2022.

Conclusion

The most powerful legislature in the UK determines the framework around which Britons live their lives. The House of Commons determines security, health, education, housing, market regulation, taxation, welfare, infrastructure and much more. The people who make up that legislature, under FPTP, do not, as a whole, represent the will of the nation. On the one hand, FPTP gives the two dominant parties more power than they deserve, and a false sense of security. On the other hand, smaller parties are stripped of power that they deserve, and are unable to fulfil the wishes of the people whom they represent. In parliament, this distortion leads to infighting, confusion, lack of vision, indecision, points-scoring, wastefulness, inefficiency, and backtracking.

What is much worse than the effects of FPTP on parliament is the effects of FPTP on society. FPTP does not give the people of the UK the means to shape their own country. This leads to division, bitterness, frustration, segregation, fragmentation, suppression, inequality, and bigotry. It leads to the erosion of trust in the institutions that people's lives depend on. And it leads to the people of the UK becoming increasingly disengaged with the very political institutions that are the cause of their disengagement.

If the majority of leading politicians continue their trend, they will talk down the importance of the voting system, stating that it is only one of many ways in which democracy and other institutions could be improved. But the truth is that *every* other discussion and debate is underpinned by the voting system that elects those people who have the power to make things happen. *Every* other policy and plan is underpinned by the fact that, no-matter what the people of the UK want, they need meaningful choice if they are going to have a chance of turning their hopes and dreams into reality.

The snap election plan gives the people of the UK an opportunity. It gives them something tangible, something real, something practical, and something hopeful. It cuts away all the mistrust and baggage of existing politics, and it goes back to basics: one new party, and two simple pledges. In essence, it gives the UK electorate the chance to take their future into their own hands. I am passionate about making the UK a better place to live for *all* the people of the UK, and I ask you to join me in making the snap election plan happen.

A Call to Action

Although I have referred to the UK electorate many times in this book, if this plan is going to be a success, it will need people of *all* ages and backgrounds to be engaged. If you are not eligible to vote, because of your age, residence status etc., know that you are also crucial to making the plan a success.

If you like the plan, please consider taking further action without delay. Some ideas:

- Write a review of this book.
- Tell people about the snap election plan.
- ‘Like’ the Facebook page www.facebook.com/SnapElecPlan
- ‘Share’ the Facebook page.
- Post on the Facebook page.
- Use the hashtag #SnapElectionPlan or #snapelectionplan on social media.
- Contact me via the Facebook page, or at snapelectionplan@gmail.com, to let me know what you think of the plan.

Appendix: My Facebook Posts Since the EU Referendum

What follows are all my Facebook posts since the EU referendum. I have not included my responses to comments, whether I wrote my response in the comment section or by re-posting it. Neither sentences in italics nor sentences in quotation marks are my words.

Saturday 25th June 2016

Thank you to all those who exercised their democratic right on Thursday and voted. I voted _____ [removed for legal reasons] and respect the result to Leave. The binary vote was democracy at its purest, simple and to the point. Sadly it seems there are very few chances for the people of the U.K. to have a direct influence in this way. Our far-from-perfect first-past-the-post voting system comes nowhere close; 16 % [sic] of votes resulting in 1 UKIP MP anyone? And who knows what 16 % [sic] would have been were it not for the reality of a "wasted vote". Had those voices been heard sooner, I suspect Thursday's result may have been different. Democracy got off the sofa on Thursday, went outside into the sunshine, and stretched its legs. Let's now pull together to achieve what the majority of us want.

Saturday 25th June 2016

To William Oliver Healey, the other 1,691,662 signatories, and all those who are considering signing the petition for a 2nd EU referendum.

Some questions for consideration:

1. What happens if the 2nd referendum results don't meet the proposed criteria? What then, a 3rd referendum? Would there be a limit as to the number of referendums and what would this be? Would there be an expenditure and/or time limit?
2. If the result of the 2nd referendum results in a vote to Remain, is it okay for the Leave camp to void the result and suggest a new set of rules for another referendum?
3. If the result had been 52:48 in favour of Remain would you sign this petition? If not, why?
4. Before the 1st referendum were you content with the set of rules? If not, what did you do about it? Why should we trust that you will honour the rules this time? Does your honouring the rules just depend on the result?
5. Was the first referendum a huge waste of resources?
6. If you and I played a game of chess, the game was close but you lost, would you declare the result void and ask for a rematch with a new set of rules?
7. What does democracy mean to you? Is it important? If not, where does this leave us in terms of freedom, security, tolerance and respect?
8. Is democracy the foundation of our society? If so, by signing the petition are you playing with fire?

Monday 27th June 2016

Here are three comments that I've seen in the media following the EU referendum result, and my questions for those of you who agree with them:

Parliament should ignore the referendum result as it has a responsibility to protect the greater interests of our country

Who should decide what the greater interests of our country are? Is the greater interest of our country the sum of each person's view of what the greater interest is? And does the same reasoning apply to the best way to achieve that greater interest?

Thought experiment: If the turnout had been 100 %, and the result had been 99:1 in favour of Leave, and those 99 % said that they voted Leave purely because they did not like the design of the EU flag, should parliament still ignore the will of the people because the remaining 1 % (which includes all those in parliament) believe that it would not be in the greater interests of the country?

Such a big decision should not have been put to a public vote

Then who should decide this big decision? Elected politicians? Who ultimately elects these politicians, the people who make up the country? Are politicians, by their very existence, not obliged to represent the people's desires, no-matter what those desires are?

Even if someone cannot read or write, but can have the basic principles of how they are governed explained to them, are they capable of deciding for themselves how they want to be governed?

If someone voted Leave on the basis of false information, should their vote not count, and should they be discouraged from voting in the future?

If we pick holes in people's reasoning, or claim that their sources of information were unsound, will this discourage people voting in the future? Instead, if we encourage every eligible voter to vote, would this put pressure on politics/campaigns/debate to cater for people from all levels of intellectual intelligence, reasoning ability, wealth and class i.e. to make politics relevant and understandable to everyone?

We elect politicians to make such decisions

When we elected our politicians, by voting for a party at our last general election, did we have a concrete commitment from them how they would vote on this question on our behalf? Was this the only matter that played a part in how we cast our vote? Were we certain that our opinion on this question would not change between the time of the general election and the time of the elected politicians making a decision?

Does our first-past-the-post general election voting system always allow us to elect the politicians who we want to see in positions of influence?

The proportion of MPs in favour of Leave was 25 %, yet the proportion of the public in favour of Leave was 52 %? Is this not proof that, had politicians been allowed to decide to Remain, they would not have been representing (at that snapshot in time, and on that particular question) the very people who put them into a position of power?

If the collective, personal views of our politicians was to Leave the EU, would you still think the decision should have been left to our politicians?

Monday 27th June 2016

<https://www.virgin.com/.../calling-parliament-take-second-look...>

The above webpage contains the text:

"[Leave voters] quickly learned that they'd been repeatedly misled to by the Leave campaign"

To all those who agree that this should play a part in whether or not to have a 2nd EU referendum, I have the following questions for you:

1. Have politicians been known in the past to mislead, bend the truth, spin, etc.?
2. Is this considered by voters to be the norm when it comes to campaigning?
3. Did the Remain campaign mislead in any way?
4. Do voters have freedom to choose their information sources and decide on the accuracy of information?
5. Should voters be obliged to take responsibility for their decisions and actions? If not, should they be eligible to vote?

6. If a 2nd referendum goes ahead, and exactly the same set of circumstances arises i.e. 52:48 win for Leave, 72 % turnout, misleading claims by Leave during the run-up, should a 3rd referendum take place? 4th? Could there, in theory, be 10 consecutive referendums, all asking the same question? Should the 10th be decisive if no misleading claims are made? Should the results of the other 9 hold any weight? If so, how much?

7. In this instance, Remain is asking to re-write the rules based on their terms i.e. ignore the result on the basis of misleading information during the run-up. If the 2nd referendum doesn't go Leave's way, should they have the right to set new criteria for a 3rd referendum on terms that they deem might suit them, e.g. not content with the turnout rate, not content with the margin of the win, not content with the weather on polling day? If not, why?

8. Would you make the effort to vote if you knew there was a chance that, for some reason that was not stated before polling day, the result would not be respected?

9. Considering the above, would a 2nd referendum on this basis make a mockery of, and undermine the credibility and robustness of, our political and democratic processes?

Thursday 30th June 2016

"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and Senators and Congressmen and Government officials but the voters of this country."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Friday 1st July 2016

[I discovered a positive online article on Brexit and trade but, soon after posting a link to it, it was pointed out to me that the article contained fundamental inaccuracies, so I deleted the link.]

Monday 4th July 2016

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/hold-the-bbc-to-account-for-it-s-smear-campaign-on-jeremy-corbyn?source=facebook-share-button&time=1467553419>

Monday 4th July

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-labour-leadership-chilcot-report-latest-news-alex-salmond-a7116926.html>

Tuesday 5th July 2016

<http://www.thecanary.co/2016/07/05/labour-plotters-found-savage-way-purge-corbyn-voters-ahead-leadership-election/>

Saturday 9th July 2016

<http://www.independent.co.uk/.../brexit-government-rejects-eu...>

40 per cent agree that there should be a referendum on the exit deal that the Government negotiates, and that the UK should seek to Remain in the EU if the public rejects the terms

For all those in the 40 %, and all those currently undecided, I ask the following with the long-term interests of the UK in mind:

- What was the purpose of the first referendum?

- Is a national referendum a tool to gauge national mood or to make a national decision?
- If the government had wanted to gauge national mood, could they have used other tools to achieve this e.g. polls?
- If we use referendums as a means to gauge national mood, what tool do we have left to make an important national decision? And what if this decision has to be made quickly? If the tool is damaged, how could we depend on it in the future? What if it is needed during a national crisis that needs an urgent result e.g. as a result of military threats? What if that result was even closer e.g. 51:49? Should the result stand, or should a re-run be considered if public mood changes straight after the referendum? What if it's close again, and the public mood swings back?
- Might the damage caused to our referendum process deter voters from even voting? How damaging might a low turnout be at a referendum?
- Why should we expect the electorate to commit time to making the right decision, then to turn up on polling day, if they don't know what they're voting for?
- Conversely, if a voter thinks that if he/she makes a poor decision, it won't matter anyway (as the public mood will reverse the result by some means or another in the long run), why would he/she bother to get it right the first time? Would this, again, weaken the validity of the process and result?
- If the result of the next general election means that one of the two main parties just scrapes a majority government, should requests for a re-run be considered if the public mood so demands?
- Back to the EU. Let's say a second referendum goes ahead on this basis. Would the result be decisive? If so, what level of detail on the exit deal should be available beforehand? Who should decide this level of detail?
- How many resources should the EU be expected to commit to detailed negotiations, knowing that the UK government may decide

to Remain anyway? Who should pay for the EU's resources in this regard?

- If a second referendum goes ahead on this basis, and the vote is to Leave, should there be a third referendum, once more resources have been allocated to negotiations and once we have an even better idea of the exit deal? What about a fourth referendum when we're, say, two years down the line and have an even better understanding of the exit terms?

Wednesday 13th July 2016

On 22nd November 2008 I walked across the border from a communist country into a democratic one. I had spent six weeks in the former, travelling mainly on my own. As I walked across the border it is no exaggeration to write that it was the most liberating experience of my life: happiness, laughter, joy, bustling markets, haggling, openness, warmth, enlightenment, uplifting, emancipated, free.

Please consider how valuable democracy is to you. Our electoral system (first past the post) already gives our two main political parties an undemocratic advantage. For those eighteen people who voted to put Jeremy Corbyn's name automatically on the ballot, I'd like to thank you for not allowing our democracy to be further damaged for apparent personal short-term gain.

For all those who care about the outcome of the leadership contest, I urge you, please, use your voice now, not after the votes have been counted.

Thursday 14th July 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/13/corbyn-critics-destroying-labour-party-members?CMP=sharebtnfb>

“Corbyn’s critics are hellbent on destroying the party they claim to love”

Sunday 17th July 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10154408658939047&set=a.58094494046.85570.617604046&type=3>

Monday 1st August 2016

Hmm, sounds reasonable
<https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/>

Thursday 3rd November 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/nov/03/parliament-must-trigger-brexit-high-court-rules>

Oh dear...the process drags out further. Not even a small part of me celebrated this news. If we accept our dodgy FPTP voting system, there was a mandate for the referendum. Then parliament approved the legislation providing for the vote, so why can't we just let government get on with it? ...yet more red tape and bureaucracy.

On a personal level, I was shocked and saddened by the result of the referendum. In generations to come, we may re-join the EU, the EU may disintegrate, another bloc might be founded, or other allegiances and deals forged (anything is possible), but what precedent would be set if we chose not to deliver on the referendum vote? Would it shake our confidence in all our democratic institutions? Would it divide society? Conversely, could we see this as an opportunity to bring society closer together, in saying that, no-matter what our individual views, one thing that we all have in common is our respect for one another, our tolerance of minority views (provided laws are not broken), and our belief in democratic governance?

Sunday 6th November 2016

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/05/the-people-have-made-their-democratic-decision-and-a-principle-i/>

What does the ruling mean?

MPs will have to be given a vote on whether the UK can start the process of leaving the EU. This means the Government cannot trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty - beginning formal discussions with the EU - on its own.

Okay, let me get this straight:

1. Tories promise to hold EU referendum.
2. People vote Tories into power.
3. Parliament gets a say on whether Tories can hold an EU referendum.
4. Parliament approves in/out EU referendum.
5. People vote out/leave.
6. Parliament gets a say on whether or not Article 50 should be triggered, thus having a say on whether or not we leave the EU.

Is this accurate? If so, is there something fundamentally wrong with #6? The people want out but a handful of them, who the people voted into power, can veto it? MPs, you agreed to the referendum and had your chance to vote on 23rd June just like the rest of us. Triggering Article 50 should surely be a done deal. Am I missing something? Oh, and if the three judges interpreted our laws correctly, job well done to them, but can I suggest we amend the relevant laws?

Thursday 10th November 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/senatorsanders/posts/10155320833612908>

Donald Trump tapped into the anger of a declining middle class that is sick and tired of establishment economics, establishment politics and the establishment media. People are tired of working longer hours for lower wages, of seeing decent paying jobs go to China and other low-wage countries, of billionaires not paying any federal income taxes and of not being able to afford a college education for their kids - all while the very rich become much richer.

To the degree that Mr. Trump is serious about pursuing policies that improve the lives of working families in this country, I and other

progressives are prepared to work with him. To the degree that he pursues racist, sexist, xenophobic and anti-environment policies, we will vigorously oppose him.

Friday 11th November 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/JonathanPieReporter/videos/1044777035645189/>

“Pie thinks he knows who is to blame for the rise of Trump...and you're not going to like it!”

Saturday 13th May 2017

Don't miss the boat, register to vote...then vote on 8th June, even if only for the least-bad option!

Monday 29th May 2017

To all those who are not sure whether to vote...

The framework on which we base our lives is decided by people who vote. Votes lead to elected representatives, and elected representatives have power to make, and influence, high-level decisions.

If our democracy is maintained for all general elections after this one, everything that you take for granted could, in theory, be taken away from you by people who stand for election and people who vote. Conversely, everything that you hope for (within the limits of the resources of the UK) could, again, in theory, be given to you by people who stand for election and people who vote. For this general election, the theoretical scope of its effect isn't as big, but it's big nonetheless. Theoretically, we could have a majority UKIP government, or a majority Green Party government.

In practice, your vote, considered collectively, could mean the difference between a landslide Conservative government and a majority Labour government. Or, more realistically, between a landslide Conservative government and a coalition or minority

government. More realistically still, your vote could mean the difference between a landslide Conservative government and a more moderate majority Conservative government, which would still make a difference to how our government looks and how it can make, and influence, decisions.

Each individual vote, on its own, makes little difference to the final outcome, but we don't cast votes once all the others have been counted. By voting, you are adding yourself to a group. When it comes to elected representatives, it doesn't matter how much you care; if you don't vote (or don't influence those who do), your views don't count. And even with our FPTP voting system, if your vote doesn't count directly, it does, at least, highlight the system's failings.

Whether you vote or not, representatives *will* be elected (or chosen at random if the extremely-unlikely scenario occurs in which no-one votes, or if there is a tie), and they *will* make, and influence, decisions that will affect your life. So, if you don't associate yourself with any of the candidates and what they represent, choose the one whom you would least mind representing your views. Or, if you want to vote tactically, given the FPTP voting system that we have, that's good too.

Don't be put off from voting because you think that you are ill-informed, that you are too young, or that your views are not valid. Do as little or as much research as you want; if you want to make your choice based on the preachings of a man on the street, I urge you to do it, but remember that your future may (under a PR voting system I would replace "may" with "will") be shaped by what you decide. Or just get an impartial summary from someone you trust, then decide. If you are concerned that you might change your mind after voting, don't be. Everyone makes the decision based on what they think at the time, with the information that they feel sufficient. All voters are in the same boat in that sense.

Our democracy forms the basis of our way of life, and our democracy depends on a variety of people standing for election, and people voting. However warped and ineffective our voting system may seem, it is, after all, the best peaceful means that we have for people's views to be represented proportionally in parliament, so that we live in a fair and just society.

The future belongs to you just as much as the next voter. On 8th June, I urge you to submit your choice. [#VoteGE2017](#)

Friday 9th June 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/09/young-people-spoken-jeremy-corbyn-social-media>

Best UK general election turnout since 1997 - well done to everyone who voted!

Friday 9th June 2017

Brexit

1.2 million Britons abroad, and 3.3 million EU nationals in Britain, are in limbo. Thousands of businesses and millions of households, at home and abroad, face uncertainty. The EU is negotiating on behalf of 27 member states, each with its own political parties and government, and it has been, for months, organised and ready to negotiate. On the other hand, the UK set the terms of the referendum, set the date of the referendum, set the date for triggering Article 50, and only has to represent itself. Yet, 12 months after the referendum, we have little clarity on who will negotiate on behalf of the UK and what our negotiating position will be. Once the dust has settled, we need to ask difficult questions and take a hard look at our political system and whether it encourages and rewards responsible leadership.

Sunday 11th June 2017

There seems to be a lot of bitterness directed towards the Democratic Unionist Party. Whatever their political stance (of which there is much that I disagree with), they are a legitimate political party, and those who voted for them are our fellow UK citizens. The party was founded in 1971 and they did not choose for us to be in this political mess just like the rest of us. Can I suggest that we show more restraint and respect? If there is dismay that the DUP should be able to form a working majority with the Conservatives in our UK parliament, then I suggest that we direct our frustrations at the fact that the UK has no written/codified constitution. As with Brexit, we seem to be making things up as we go along. Our democracy needs a complete rethink, in my view, starting with voting reform.

Tuesday 19th September 2017

<https://madmimi.com/s/96ffca>

“MPs will debate Proportional Representation! Read how it happened and contact your MP”