

**Globalized Election
Weekly Report
June 09, 2010 to June 16, 2010**

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Week # 123

A general election was held in the United Kingdom on Thursday 6 May 2010 to elect members to the House of Commons. The general election took place in 649 constituencies across the United Kingdom, under the first-past-the-post system. The Conservative Party under David Cameron won the largest number of votes and seats, but fell short of the 326 seats needed to have an overall majority. It was the first time since 1974, and only the second time since the Second World War, that a British general election returned a hung parliament.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Capital (and largest city)	London 51°30'N 0°7'W / 51.5°N 0.117°W / 51.5; -0.117
Official language(s)	English (de facto)
Recognised regional languages	Irish, Ulster Scots, Scottish Gaelic , Scots, Welsh, Cornish
Ethnic groups (2001 See: UK ethnic groups list)	92.1% White (mainly of British Isles descent, with minorities of other descent) 4.0% South Asian 2.0% Black 1.2% Mixed 0.4% Chinese 0.4% Other
Demonym	British or Briton
Government	Parliamentary system, Constitutional monarchy, Unitary state
- Monarch	Queen Elizabeth II
- Prime Minister	David Cameron MP
Legislature	Parliament
- Upper House	House of Lords
- Lower House	House of Commons

Formation

- Acts of Union 1707 1 May 1707
- Act of Union 1800 1 January 1801
- Anglo-Irish Treaty 12 April 1922

EU accession 1 January 1973

Area

- Total 243,610 km² (79th)
94,060 sq mi
- Water (%) 1.34

Population

- 2010 estimate 62,041,708
- 2001 census 58,789,194
- Density 254.7/km² (51st)
659.6/sq Military Intelligence

GDP (PPP) 2009 estimate

- Total \$2.139 trillion
- Per capita \$34,619

GDP (nominal) 2009 estimate

- Total \$2.183 trillion
- Per capita \$35,334

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (commonly known as the United Kingdom, the UK or Britain) is a sovereign state located off the northwestern coast of continental Europe. It is an island country, spanning an archipelago including Great Britain, the northeastern part of the island of Ireland, and many small islands. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with a land border, sharing it with the Republic of Ireland. Apart from this land border, the UK is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the English Channel and the Irish Sea. The largest island, Great Britain, is linked to France by the Channel Tunnel.

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and unitary state consisting of four countries: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is governed by a parliamentary system with its seat of government in London, the capital, but with three devolved national administrations of varying powers in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh, the capitals of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland respectively. The Channel Island bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey, and the Isle of Man are Crown Dependencies, which means they are constitutionally tied to the British monarch but are not part of the UK. The UK has fourteen overseas territories that are not constitutionally part of the UK. These territories are remnants of the British Empire, which at its height in 1922 encompassed almost a quarter of the world's land surface, the largest empire in history. British influence can still be observed in the language, culture and legal systems of many of its former colonies.

The UK is a developed country, with the world's sixth largest economy by nominal GDP and the sixth largest by purchasing power parity. It was the world's first industrialised country and the world's foremost power during the 19th and early 20th centuries, but the economic and social cost of two world wars and the decline of its empire in the latter half of the 20th century diminished its leading role in global affairs. The UK nevertheless remains a major power with strong economic, cultural, military, scientific and political influence. It is a recognised nuclear weapons state and has the fourth highest defence spending in the world. It is a Member State of the European Union, a permanent member

of the United Nations Security Council, and is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, G8, G20, NATO, OECD, and the World Trade Organization.

2. History

The United Kingdom was created out of the existing historic kingdoms of England (including Wales), Ireland and Scotland. Between the 17th and 19th centuries a series of political events brought these constituent elements into a close political union. England, Ireland and Scotland were brought into a personal union by the Union of the Crowns in 1603, when James VI, King of Scots inherited the Kingdoms of England and Ireland and moved his court from Edinburgh to London, although all three kingdoms retained their separate political institutions. On 1 May 1707, the Kingdom of Great Britain was created by the political union of the Kingdom of England (which included Wales) and the Kingdom of Scotland. This event was the result of the Treaty of Union that was agreed on 22 July 1706, and then ratified by both the Parliament of England and Parliament of Scotland each passing an Act of Union in 1707. Almost a century later, the Kingdom of Ireland, merged with the Kingdom of Great Britain to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland with the passing of the Act of Union 1800. Disputes within Ireland over the terms of Irish Home Rule led eventually to the partition of the island in 1921, with Dominion status for the Irish Free State in 1922 and Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK. As a result, in 1927, the formal title of the UK was changed to its current form, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Territories that were at one time part of the British Empire. Current British Overseas Territories are underlined in red.

In its first century, the United Kingdom played an important role in developing Western ideas of the parliamentary system as well as making significant contributions to literature, the arts, and science. The UK-led Industrial Revolution transformed the country and fuelled the growing British Empire. During this time the UK, like other great powers, was involved in colonial exploitation, including the Atlantic slave trade, although with the passing of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 the UK took a leading role in combating the trade in slaves.

After the defeat of France in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), the UK emerged as the principal naval and economic power of the 19th century (with

London the largest city in the world from about 1830 to 1930) and remained a major power into the mid 20th century. Beside Russia, France and (after 1917) the USA, the British were one of the major powers opposing Germany and its allies in World War I (1914-18). Engaged in much of its empire, several regions in Europe and increasingly taking a major role on the Western front, the armed forces grew to over five million people. The nation suffered an estimated two and a half million casualties and finished the war with a huge national debt. After the war the United Kingdom received the League of Nations mandate over former German and Ottoman colonies and the British Empire had expanded to its greatest extent, covering a fifth of the world's land surface and a quarter of its population. The Great Depression (1929–32) broke out at a time when the UK was still far from having recovered from the effects of the war and led to hardship and political and social unrest.

The United Kingdom was one of the three main Allies of World War II. Following the defeat of its European allies in the first year of the war, the United Kingdom continued the fight against Germany in the aerial campaign known as the Battle of Britain. After the victory, the UK was one of the Big Three powers that met to plan the postwar world. World War II left the United Kingdom financially damaged. However, Marshall Aid and costly loans taken from both the United States and Canada helped the UK on the road to recovery.

The immediate post-war years saw the establishment of the Welfare State, including among the world's first and most comprehensive public health services. Changes in government policy also brought people from all over the Commonwealth to create a multiethnic Britain. Although the new postwar limits of Britain's political role were confirmed by the Suez Crisis of 1956, the international spread of the English language meant the continuing influence of its literature and culture, while from the 1960s its popular culture also found influence abroad.

Following a period of global economic slowdown and industrial strife in the 1970s, the 1980s saw the inflow of substantial North Sea oil revenues and economic growth. The premiership of Margaret Thatcher marked a significant change of direction from the post-war political and economic consensus; a path that has continued under the New Labour

governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown since 1997, which ended on the 11th May 2010.

The United Kingdom was one of the 12 founding members of the European Union at its launch in 1992 with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. Prior to that, it had been a member of the EU's forerunner, the European Economic Community (EEC), from 1973. The attitude of the present Labour government towards further integration with this organisation is mixed, with the Official Opposition, the Conservative Party, favouring fewer powers and competencies being transferred to the EU. The end of the 20th century saw major changes to the governance of the UK with the establishment of devolved national administrations for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales following pre-legislative referenda.

3. Government and politics

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy: Queen Elizabeth II is head of state of the UK as well as of fifteen other Commonwealth countries, putting the UK in a personal union with those other states. The Crown has sovereignty over the Crown Dependencies of the Isle of Man and the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey, which are not part of the United Kingdom though the UK government manages their foreign affairs and defence and the UK Parliament has the authority to legislate on their behalf.

The United Kingdom has an uncodified constitution, as do only three other countries in the world. The Constitution of the United Kingdom thus consists mostly of a collection of disparate written sources, including statutes, judge-made case law, and international treaties. As there is no technical difference between ordinary statutes and "constitutional law," the UK Parliament can perform "constitutional reform" simply by passing Acts of Parliament and thus has the political power to change or abolish almost any written or unwritten element of the constitution. However, no Parliament can pass laws that future Parliaments cannot change.

The UK has a parliamentary government based on the Westminster system that has been emulated around the world—a legacy of the British Empire. The Parliament of the United Kingdom that meets in the Palace of Westminster has two houses: an elected House of Commons and an appointed House of Lords, and any Bill passed requires Royal Assent to become law. It is the ultimate legislative authority in the United Kingdom since the

devolved parliament in Scotland and devolved assemblies in Northern Ireland, and Wales are not sovereign bodies and could be abolished by the UK parliament despite being established following public approval as expressed in referenda.

The position of Prime Minister, the UK's head of government, belongs to the Member of Parliament who can obtain the confidence of a majority in the House of Commons, usually the current leader of the largest political party in that chamber. The Prime Minister and Cabinet are formally appointed by the Monarch to form Her Majesty's Government, though the Prime Minister chooses the Cabinet, and by convention HM The Queen respects the Prime Minister's choices.

The Cabinet is traditionally drawn from members of the Prime Minister's party in both legislative houses, and mostly from the House of Commons, to which they are responsible. Executive power is exercised by the Prime Minister and Cabinet, all of whom are sworn into Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, and become Ministers of the Crown. The Rt. Hon. David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party, has been Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service since 11 May 2010.

For elections to the House of Commons, the UK is currently divided into 650 constituencies. Each constituency elects one Member of Parliament by simple plurality. General elections are called by the Monarch when the Prime Minister so advises. Though there is no minimum term for a Parliament, the Parliament Act (1911) requires that a new election must be called within five years of the previous general election.

The UK's three major political parties are the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, and the Liberal Democrats, who won between them 621 out of the 649 seats available in the House of Commons at the 2010 general election (with one seat as yet unelected). Most of the remaining seats were won by parties that only contest elections in one part of the UK such as the Scottish National Party (Scotland only), Plaid Cymru (Wales only), and the Democratic Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party, Ulster Unionist Party, and Sinn Féin (Northern Ireland only, though Sinn Féin also contests elections in Ireland). In accordance with party policy, no elected Sinn Féin Member of Parliament has ever attended the House of Commons to speak in the House on behalf of their constituents as Members of Parliament are required to take an oath of allegiance to the

Monarch. However, the current five Sinn Féin MPs have since 2002 made use of the offices and other facilities available at Westminster.

For elections to the European Parliament, the UK currently has 72 MEPs, elected in 12 multi-member constituencies. Questions over sovereignty have been brought forward because of the UK's membership of the European Union.

Devolved national administrations

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales each has its own government or Executive, led by a First Minister, and a devolved, unicameral legislature. England, the largest country of the United Kingdom, has no devolved executive or legislature and is administered and legislated for directly by the UK government and parliament on all issues. This situation has given rise to the so-called West Lothian question which concerns the fact that MPs from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can vote, sometimes decisively, on matters affecting England that are handled by devolved legislatures for their own constituencies.

The Scottish Government and Parliament have wide ranging powers over any matter that has not been specifically 'reserved' to the UK parliament, including education, healthcare, Scots law and local government. Following their victory at the 2007 elections, the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) formed a minority government with its leader, Alex Salmond, becoming First Minister of Scotland. The pro-union parties responded to the electoral success of the SNP by creating a Commission on Scottish Devolution which reported in 2009, recommending that additional powers should be devolved, including control of half the income tax raised in Scotland.

The Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales have more limited powers than those devolved to Scotland, although following the passing of the Government of Wales Act 2006, the Assembly can now legislate in some areas through Assembly Measures passed within clearly defined areas based upon, Legislative Competence Orders which can be granted on a case by case basis. The current Welsh Assembly Government was formed several weeks after the 2007 elections, following a brief period of minority administration, when Plaid Cymru joined Labour in a coalition government under the continuing leadership of First Minister Rhodri Morgan.

The Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly have powers closer to those already devolved to Scotland. The Northern Ireland Executive is led by a diarchy, currently First Minister Peter Robinson (Democratic Unionist Party) and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness (Sinn Féin).

Local government

The administrative geography of the United Kingdom is complex, multi-layered and non-uniform as each country of the United Kingdom has its own system of administrative and geographic demarcation with origins that pre-date the United Kingdom itself. Consequently, there is "no common stratum of administrative unit encompassing the United Kingdom". Until the 19th century there was little change to those arrangements, but since then there has been a constant evolution of role and function. Change did not occur in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in a uniform manner, and the devolution of power over local government to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland means that future changes are unlikely to be uniform either.

The organisation of local government in England is complex, with the distribution of functions varying according to the local arrangements. Legislation concerning local government in England is decided by the UK parliament and the government of the United Kingdom, because England does not have a devolved parliament. The upper-tier subdivisions of England are the nine Government office regions or European Union government office regions. One region, Greater London, has had a directly elected assembly and mayor since 2000 following popular support for the proposal in a referendum. It was intended that other regions would also be given their own elected regional assemblies, but a rejection by a referendum in 2004 of a proposed assembly in the North East region stopped this idea in its tracks. Below the region level, London consists of 32 London boroughs and the rest of England has either county councils and district councils or unitary authorities. Councillors are elected by First Past The Post in single member wards or by the multi-member plurality system in multi-member wards.

Local government in Northern Ireland has, since 1973, been organised into 26 district councils, each elected by single transferable vote with powers limited to services like collecting waste, controlling dogs, and maintaining parks and cemeteries. However, on

13 March 2008, the Executive agreed on proposals to create 11 new councils to replace the present system and the next local elections will be postponed until 2011 to facilitate this.

Local government in Scotland is divided on a basis of 32 council areas, with wide variation in both size and population. The cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee are separate council areas as also is Highland Council, which includes a third of Scotland's area but just over 200,000 people. The power invested in local authorities is administered by elected councillors, of which there are currently 1,222 who are each paid a part-time salary. Elections are conducted by single transferable vote in multi-member wards that elect either three or four councillors. Each council elects a Provost or Convenor to chair meetings of the council and to act as a figurehead for the area. Councillors are subject to a code of conduct enforced by the Standards Commission for Scotland. The representative association of Scotland's local authorities is the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

Local government in Wales consists of 22 unitary authorities, including the cities of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, which are separate unitary authorities in their own right. Elections are held every four years by First Past The Post with the most recent elections being in May 2008. The Welsh Local Government Association represents the interests of local authorities in Wales.

Elections in the United Kingdom

There are five types of elections in the United Kingdom: United Kingdom general elections, elections to devolved parliaments and assemblies, elections to the European Parliament, local elections and mayoral elections. Elections are held on Election Day, which is conventionally a Thursday. General elections do not have fixed dates, but must be called within five years of the opening of parliament following the last election. Other elections are held on fixed dates though in the case of the devolved assemblies and parliaments, early elections can occur in certain situations. Presently, six electoral systems are used: single member plurality system (First Past the Post), multi member plurality system, Party list, Single Transferable Vote, Additional Member System and Supplementary Vote.

Eligibility

Anyone who is a citizen of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, or of a Commonwealth country, who is legally resident in the United Kingdom, and who is 18 or over on the date of the election is eligible to vote, provided they are on the electoral register, unless they are currently a member of the House of Lords, imprisoned for a criminal offence, declared mentally incapable of making a reasoned judgement, or have been convicted of corrupt or illegal practices in connection with an election within the previous five years. Members of the House of Lords may, however, vote in local and European Elections as well as elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. Voting is not compulsory. In addition, while British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens may register to vote in all elections, European Union nationals resident in the United Kingdom may register to vote only in local, European, Scottish and Welsh elections.

In theory, members of the Royal Family who do not hold a peerage, including the Monarch, are eligible to vote, although in practice they do not exercise that right. Citizens of the United Kingdom who have moved abroad can register to vote as an overseas voter provided that they were registered in the United Kingdom within the previous 15 years. They would vote for the MP of the constituency in which they lived before they moved abroad. This is also applicable to people who were under 18 before they moved abroad; when they reach 18 they can vote. "Service voters"—including forces personnel, diplomats and other public servants resident overseas—are also eligible. Voters must appear on the electoral register in order to vote; they can now be added to the register until eleven working days before the election. The electoral register in 2000 listed 44,423,440 people registered to vote in the United Kingdom, of whom 36,994,211 were in England.

The right of Irish and Commonwealth citizens to vote is a legacy of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which limited the vote to British subjects. At that time, "British subjects" included the people of Ireland — then part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland — and all other parts of the British Empire. Though most of Ireland (see Ireland Act 1949) and the majority of the colonies became independent nations, their citizens have retained the right to vote if they live in the United Kingdom.

Party system

Traditionally (with the sole exception of 1923), the United Kingdom effectively has had a two party system arising from the use of the First-Past-The-Post system for general and local elections. Duverger's law certainly seems borne out in the history of British parliamentary politics. Before World War I, the United Kingdom had a true two-party system, the main parties being the Tories (which became the Conservative Party) and the Whigs (which became the Liberal Party), though after Catholic Emancipation there was also a substantial Irish Parliamentary Party. After World War II, the dominant parties have been Conservative and Labour. No third party has come close to winning a parliamentary majority.

However, some have challenged the view that the United Kingdom still has a two party system, since the Liberal Democrats have won around 15%–25% of the votes in recent elections. The Liberal Democrats won 62 of the 646 seats in the House of Commons in the 2005 general election, and several nationalist (regional) groupings hold seats as well, leading some spectators to regard the Westminster parliament as a "two and a half" party system.

Smaller parties receive many more votes (and seats) in the elections using a proportional system, which are the regional elections for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly and London Assembly, and the European Parliament elections. Regional parties, such as the Scottish National Party or Plaid Cymru receive many more votes than at general or local elections, and at European elections, the United Kingdom Independence Party and Green Party of England and Wales perform better. It can be argued that in these elections, there is a multi-party system.

It is relatively easy to stand for election as an independent candidate, although wins are very rare and usually involve special circumstances (for example Martin Bell's 1997 victory against the discredited Conservative MP Neil Hamilton was aided by the major parties standing aside and not contesting the election). Following the 2005 general election, there are three independent MPs, the highest number since 1945. To stand as a candidate in a particular constituency, a British citizen needs the signatures of 10 people registered to vote there, and pay a deposit of £500 (which is returned if he/she gains more than 5% of the vote in that seat).

General elections

United Kingdom general elections are the elections held when the Members of Parliament (MPs) forming the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom are elected. Following the Parliament Act 1911, parliamentary sessions last a maximum of five years, and are ended with the dissolution of Parliament. Therefore elections are not fixed, and the time is chosen by the governing party to maximise political advantage. The 2010 election was held on May 6, 2010.

Candidates aim to win particular geographic constituencies in the United Kingdom. Each constituency elects one MP by the first past the post system of election. At the 2005 general election, there were 646 constituencies, thus 646 MPs were elected to Parliament. Boundary changes in Scotland reduced the number of MPs from 659 at the 2001 election to 646. The party with the most seats, i.e. the most MPs, usually forms the government, and the second largest party forms Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Almost all candidates are members of a political party and the majority of voters in the United Kingdom choose who to vote for based on the candidates' parties, rather than the personalities or opinions of the individual candidates.

Timing

A general election must take place before each parliamentary term begins. Since the maximum term of a parliament is five years, the interval between successive general elections can exceed that period by no more than the combined length of the election campaign and time for the new parliament to assemble (typically five to eight weeks). The five years runs from the first meeting of Parliament following the election. The timing of an election is at the discretion of the incumbent Prime Minister. This timing is usually political, and thus if a government is popular then the election is often "called" after around four years in power.

The Prime Minister asks the Monarch to dissolve Parliament by Royal Proclamation. The Proclamation also orders the issue of the formal Writs of Election which require an election to be held in each constituency. The election is held 17 working days after the date of the Proclamation, as regulated by the Representation of the People Act 1983, s. 23 and Schedule 1 ("Parliamentary election rules"), rule 1 ("Timetable").

Since 1935 every general election has been held on a Thursday. Of the 17 general elections between 1945 and 2005, four each were held in May, June and October, and two were held in February.

The Cabinet Office imposes Purdah before elections. This is a period of roughly six weeks in which Government Departments are not allowed to communicate with members of the public about any new or controversial Government initiatives (such as modernisation initiatives, administrative and legislative changes).

Post-election

Polls close at 10 p.m. and the votes are, in most constituencies, counted immediately. The earliest results are declared by about 11 p.m., with most having been declared by 3 or 4 a.m.; some constituencies do not declare their results until the following day.

When all of the results are known, or when one party achieves an absolute majority of the seats in the House of Commons, the first response comes from the current (and possibly outgoing) Prime Minister. If a majority in the new Parliament has been achieved by their party, they remain in office without the need for reconfirmation or reappointment—no new "term" of office is started. If a majority has not been achieved, and it is obvious that another party has the numbers to form a government, the Prime Minister submits a resignation to the Monarch. The Monarch then commissions the leader of the new majority party to form a new government. The Prime Minister has the option of attempting to remain in power even if seats have been lost. The subsequent Queen's Speech (i.e., outline of the proposed legislative programme) offers a chance for the House of Commons to cast a vote of confidence or no confidence in the government through accepting or rejecting the Queen's Speech.

By precedent, and by the absence of any formal written constitutional objection, the Monarch could dismiss the incumbent Prime Minister and seek to appoint a replacement. However, this has not occurred since the dismissal of Lord Melbourne in 1834, and would almost certainly trigger a crisis, similar to that experienced in the 1975 Australian constitutional crisis.

The most recent Prime Ministers who, having failed to win a majority, opted not to resign immediately are Edward Heath, in 1974 and Gordon Brown in 2010. In 1974, after initial

negotiations with the Liberal Party failed to provide a coalition deal, Heath resigned, allowing Queen Elizabeth II to commission Labour leader Harold Wilson to form an administration. Until the Prime Minister reacts to the election result, either by deciding to remain on or resign, the Monarch has no role. Only if the Prime Minister resigns can the Monarch then commission someone else to form a government. Thus Margaret Thatcher, who was Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, was only asked to form a government once. Similarly, Tony Blair was only ever commissioned to form a government once, in 1997. After each election, having remained in power, a Prime Minister may take the option to engage in a major or minor reshuffle of ministers, although such a reshuffle may occur at any time so wished by the PM.

The largest party not in government becomes the Official Opposition, known as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Any smaller parties not in government are collectively known as "the opposition".

Any vacancies created in the House, due to death, ennoblement, or resignation are filled by by-election. The time-frame for these is not automatic and they can be months after the vacancy was created, or even abandoned if there is a pending general election.

Previous results

Elections to national parliaments and assemblies

Scottish Parliament elections

Scottish Parliament elections occur every four years to elect the Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). The first election to the unicameral Scottish Parliament that was created by the Scotland Act 1998, was held in 1999. Elections to the Scottish Parliament are by the Additional Member System, which is a hybrid of single member plurality and party list.

2007 Election results

Additional member system										Total seats				
Constituency					Region									
Votes	%	+/-	Seats	+/-	Votes	%	+/-	Seats	+/-	Total	+/-	%		
SNP	664,227	32.9	+9.1	21	+12	633,401	31.0	+10.2	26	+8	47	+20	37.0	
Labour	648,374	32.2	-2.5	37	-9	595,415	29.2	-0.1	9	+5	46	-4	36.2	
Conservative	334,743	16.6	0	4	+1	284,005	13.9	-1.6	13	-2	17	-1	13.4	
Liberal Democrats	326,232	16.2	+0.9	11	-2	230,671	11.3	-0.5	5	+1	16	-1	12.6	
Scottish Green	2,971	0.2	+0.2	0	-	82,584	4.0	-2.8	2	-5	2	-5	1.6	
Independent	25,047	1.2	-1.2	0	-2	21,320	1.0	-0.7	1	0	1	-2	0.8	
Scottish Senior Citizens	1,702	0.1	+0	0	-	38,743	1.9	+0.4	0	-1	0	-1	0	
Solidarity	-	-	-	-	-	31,066	1.5	+1.5	0	0	0	0	0	
Scottish Christian	4,586	0.2	+0.2	0	0	26,575	1.3	+1.3	0	0	0	0	0	
BNP	-	-	-	-	-	24,616	1.2	+1.1	0	0	0	0	0	
Christian Peoples	-	-	-	-	-	14,745	0.7	+0.7	0	0	0	0	0	
Socialist Labour	-	-	-	-	-	14,244	0.7	-0.4	0	0	0	0	0	
Scottish Socialist	525	0.0	-6.2	0	-	12,731	0.6	-6.1	0	-6	0	-6	0	

UKIP	-	-	-	-	-	8,197	0.4	-0.2	0	0	0	0	0
Publican Party	-	-	-	-	-	5,905	0.3	+0.3	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Unionist	-	-	-	-	-	4,401	0.2	-0.1	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Voice	2,827	0.1	+0.1	0	0	5,955	0.3	+0.3	0	0	0	0	0
Action to Save St John's Hospital	2,814	0.1	+0.1	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0
Save Our NHS Group	-	-	-	-	-	2,682	0.1	+0.1	0	0	0	0	0
Free Scotland Party	575	0.0	+0.0	0	0	664	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Had Enough Party	498	0.0	+0.0	0	0	670	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Enterprise Party	409	0.0	+0.0	0	0	616	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Adam Lyal's Witchery Tour Party	-	-	-	-	-	867	0.0	-0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Jacobite Party	309	0.0	+0.0	0	0	446	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0

Scotland Against Crooked Lawyers	-	-	-	-	-	615	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Peace	577	0.0	+0.0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0
Communist	251	0.0	+0.0	0	0	260	0.0	-0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Green Voice	-	-	-	-	-	496	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-Trident Party	187	0.0	+0.0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0
Socialist Equality	-	-	-	-	-	139	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Equal Parenting Alliance	124	0.0	+0.0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0
Nine Per Cent Growth Party	-	-	-	-	-	80	0.0	+0.0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2,016,978	51.8	+2.5	73		2,042,109			56		129		

Notes: Independents contested 17 seats and three regions. Scottish Greens contested 1 seat, Scottish Socialist Party contested 1 seat, Scottish Christian Party, Scottish Voice etc contested a small number of seats. A number of local issue parties also stood in single constituencies.

Previous elections

Scottish Parliamentary Election 1999

Scottish Parliamentary Election 2003

Welsh Assembly elections

Welsh Assembly elections occur every four years. They elect the Members of the National Assembly for Wales (AMs). They began in 1999, when the unicameral Welsh Assembly, created by the Government of Wales Act 1998, began its first session. For elections to the Welsh Assembly the Additional Member System is used, which is a hybrid of single member plurality and proportional representation.

Welsh Assembly Election 1999

Welsh Assembly Election 2003

Welsh Assembly Election 2007

Northern Ireland Assembly elections

Northern Ireland Assembly elections occur every four years on the first Thursday in May. They began in 1998, when the assembly created by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 began its first session. For elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Single Transferable Vote system, is used. The system uses preferences, and was chosen to attempt to give adequate representation to the different sectarian groups in Northern Ireland. Elections continued even when the assembly was suspended between 2002 and 2007.

Northern Ireland Assembly Election 1998

Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2003

Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2007

European Parliament elections

European Parliament elections have taken place since the European Parliament became democratically elected in 1979. Members of the European Parliament are elected on a regional basis using the party list, a Closed list (i.e. candidates are chosen by parties), since 1999 in England, Scotland and Wales. In Northern Ireland the Single Transferable Vote system is used. The United Kingdom is divided into twelve electoral regions, which are the three smaller nations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), and the nine **Regions of England.**

The use of proportional representation greatly increased the representation of minor parties. Until the 1999 election, the First Past the Post system was used, which had prevented parties with large, but geographically spread out vote shares from receiving any seats. One of the famous instances of this was in the 1989 election the Green Party received 2,292,718 votes, constituting a 15% vote share, but no seats. The European

Parliamentary Elections Act 1999 changed the system in time for the 1999 election. From 1979 to 1989, the United Kingdom had 81 MEPs (78 in England, Wales and Scotland, 3 in Northern Ireland). The European Parliamentary Elections Act 1993 increased the number to 87, adding five more seats in England and one more in Wales).

European Parliament election, 1979

European Parliament election, 1984

European Parliament election, 1989

European Parliament election, 1994

European Parliament election, 1999

European Parliament election, 2004

European Parliament election, 2009

Regional and local elections

In local elections, councillors are elected forming the local administrations of the United Kingdom. A number of tiers of local council exist, at region, county, district/borough and town/parish levels. A variety of voting systems are used for local elections. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, the single transferable vote system is used, whilst in most of England and Wales the single member plurality system is used. The remainder of England (including all of the London Boroughs) and Wales use the plurality at-large system, except for the elections of the Mayor and Assembly of the Greater London Authority (GLA).

Local elections are held every year. In years with a general election it is usual practice to hold both general and local elections on the same day. In 2004, for the first time, local elections were held on the same day as European elections, and London Mayoral and Assembly elections. The date was referred to as 'Super Thursday'.

The only Region of England which has a directly elected administration is London. London Assembly elections began in 2000, when it was created. The Additional Member System is used for elections to the Assembly. The Mayor is elected via the Supplementary Vote system.

London Assembly election, 2000

London Assembly election, 2004

London Assembly election, 2008
London mayoral election, 2000
London mayoral election, 2004
London mayoral election, 2008
United Kingdom local elections, 2001
United Kingdom local elections, 2002
United Kingdom local elections, 2003
United Kingdom local elections, 2004
United Kingdom local elections, 2005
United Kingdom local elections, 2006
United Kingdom local elections, 2007
United Kingdom local elections, 2008
United Kingdom local elections, 2009
United Kingdom local elections, 2010
Northern Ireland local elections, 2001
Northern Ireland local elections, 2005

History

Expansion of the franchise

19th century

The system of universal suffrage did not exist in the United Kingdom until 1928. From 1688 to 1832, less than 10% of the adult male population had the right to vote.

The first act to increase the size of the electorate was the Reform Act 1832 (sometimes known as the Great Reform Act). It abolished 56 rotten boroughs (which had elected 112 MPs) and decreased the property qualification in boroughs. It gave some parliamentary representation to the industrial towns (142 MPs) by redistributing some MPs from boroughs who had disproportional representation. The electoral register was created. The overall result of the Act was that the electorate was increased to 14% of the adult male population. Although this was not a large increase, the Act was the first big step towards equal representation.

Between 1838 and 1848 a popular movement, Chartism organised around 6 demands including universal male franchise and the secret ballot.

The Reform Act 1867 redistributed more MPs from boroughs who had disproportional representation to London and industrial towns. It decreased the property qualification in boroughs, meaning all men (with an address) in boroughs could vote. The consequences were for the first time some of the working class could vote, and MPs had to take these new constituents into account. Some parties decided to become national parties. The overall effect was that the Act increased the size of the electorate to 32% of the adult male population.

The Ballot Act 1872 replaced open elections with secret ballot system. The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act 1883 criminalised attempts to bribe voters and standardised the amount that could be spent on election expenses. The Representation of the People Act 1884 and the Redistribution of Seats Act 1885 (the Third Reform Act) collectively increased the electorate to 56% of the adult male population.

20th century

The Representation of the People Act 1918 expanded the electorate to include all men over the age of 21 and all married women over the age of 30. Later that year, the Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act 1918 gave women over 30 the right to stand for election as MPs. The first woman to become an MP was Constance Markiewicz in 1918. However, she declined to take up her seat, being a member of Sinn Féin. Nancy Astor, elected in 1919, was the second woman to become an MP, and the first to sit in the Commons. The Equal Franchise Act 1928 lowered the minimum age for women to vote from 30 to 21, making men and women equal in terms of suffrage for the first time. The Representation of the People Act 1949 abolished additional votes for graduates (university constituencies) and the owners of business premises.

The Representation of the People Act 1969 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18. The Representation of the People Act 1985 gave British citizens abroad the right to vote for a five year period after they had left the United Kingdom. The Representation of the People Act 1989 extended the period to twenty years and citizens who were too young to vote when they left the country also became eligible.

Labour (post-1997) reforms

Prior to 1997, and the Labour Party government of Tony Blair, there were only three types of elections: general elections, local government elections, and elections to the European Parliament. Most elections were conducted under the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, though in Northern Ireland local government and European elections were conducted under the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. The constitutional reforms of Labour drastically changed elections, introducing elected regional assemblies and elected mayors in certain cities. Proportional Representation (PR) was introduced outside of Northern Ireland for the first time.

The hybrid (part PR, part FPTP) Additional Member System was introduced in 1999 for the newly created devolved assemblies: the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly and STV was used for the newly created Northern Ireland Assembly. The regional party list (Closed list) system was introduced for European elections in Great Britain (which had previously used single member constituency FPTP) though Northern Ireland continues to use STV.

Labour passed the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which created the Electoral Commission, which since 2000 has been responsible for the running of elections and referendums and to a limited extent regulating party funding. It also reduced the period during which British expatriates can vote, from 20 years after they emigrate to 15.

In 2008 the Ministry of Justice delivered a report that failed to conclusively recommend any particular voting system as "best" and instead simply compared working practices used in the different elections. The Minister of State for Justice, Ministry of Justice (Michael Wills) issued a statement following its publication stating that no action would be taken on the various reports that, since 1997, have suggested a move towards proportional representation for the UK general election until reform of the House of Lords is completed. Critics have claimed that failure to move away from First Past the Post is disenfranchising voters.

Current issues

Electoral reform

Some British parties, mainly the Liberal Democrats, have long proposed that the current First Past the Post system used for general elections be replaced with another system.

The introduction of proportional representation has been advocated for some time by the Liberal Democrats, and some pressure groups such as Charter 88, Unlock Democracy and the Electoral Reform Society. Recently, following the 2005 election in which Labour was elected with the lowest share of the national vote for any single party majority government in British history, more public attention has been brought to the issue. The national compact newspaper The Independent started a petition campaign for the introduction of a more proportional system immediately after the election, under the title "Campaign For Democracy". The broad-based Make Votes Count Coalition currently brings together those groups advocating reform.

Parliamentary and Party positions

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Electoral Reform is a cross party group consisting of 150 MPs that support electoral reform, chaired by Richard Burden.

Labour pledged in its manifesto for the 1997 general election to set up a commission on alternatives to the first-past-the-post system for general elections and hold a referendum in the future on whether to change the system. The Independent Commission on the Voting System, headed by Lord Jenkins of Hillhead and known as the Jenkins Commission, was established in December 1997. It reported in October 1998 and suggested the Alternative vote top-up or AV+ system.

The government had expected a recommendation which could have been implemented within the Parliament and decided that it would be impractical to have a general election using First Past the Post after a referendum decision to adopt a different system, and therefore delayed the referendum until after the next general election. In practice, forces within the Labour Party opposed to any change persuaded the party not to repeat the pledge for a referendum in the 2001 manifesto and therefore none was held once the party was re-elected.

After the 2005 election, Lord Chancellor Lord Falconer said there was "no groundswell" for change, although a Cabinet committee was given the task of investigating reform. John Prescott was made Chair; given his known opposition to change, proponents were critical and dismissive of the move. Several prominent Labour MPs have expressed a desire for investigating electoral reform, including Peter Hain (who made a speech in the House of Commons in March 2004 arguing for the Alternative Vote), Patricia Hewitt, Tessa Jowell and Baroness Amos.

As mentioned above, in January 2008 the government produced a "desk-bound" review of the experience to date of new voting systems in the United Kingdom since Labour came to power in 1997. This review was non-committal as to the need for further reform, especially as regards reform of the voting system used in General Elections.

The Conservative party are predominantly against PR. Despite the fact that the Conservative party would gain significant numbers of seats if PR was used in the last election, some in the party feel it might find itself politically isolated on the right, and face Labour/Lib Dem coalition governments. Electoral reform, towards a proportional model, is desired by the Liberal Democrat party, the Green and several other small parties.

Arguments for reform

It would be more representative of the electorate, as votes cast would be roughly proportional to seats.

No votes would be wasted if PR was used and there would be less tactical voting (which is harmful to democracy because it causes people to vote for a different party than they support).

It would widen voter choice, smaller parties would have a more realistic chance of winning seats.

It would probably reduce the large majority that the many governments (like the current government) enjoy, therefore it would produce weaker governments than with First-Past-the-Post because the governing party would have a smaller majority. This means that the effects of executive dominance would be reduced: the House of Commons would be less

of a rubber stamp and the government might be forced to compromise. Genuine debate, with meaningful impact on legislation, might be reintroduced in the Commons.

It might produce coalition governments (as in the Scottish Parliament). Advocates argue this would lead to much more emphasis on consensus, and better represent the combined will of the electorate, because coalitions include several parties.

PR is already used for the regional, European and mayoral elections; general elections should follow suit.

PR constituencies may range in size, allowing more natural boundaries to be created and maintained over time.

Arguments against reform

The direct link the FPTP system provides between voters and their local Member of Parliament would be lost if certain Proportional Representation systems were adopted. However this would not be the case if a hybrid PR system was used, such as the Additional Member System (used for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly) or alternative vote top-up (suggested by the Jenkins Commission), or if a majoritarian system such as Supplementary Vote used for Mayoral elections was selected. The Single Transferable Vote used for elections within many organisations in the United Kingdom and for local elections in both Northern Ireland and Scotland allows for multi-member constituencies elected via a proportional system but retains the constituency link because MPs are elected as individual representative as opposed to being elected from party lists. This system is used in the Republic of Ireland and means that every voter has a direct link to not one, but between 3 and 5 members, directly elected by their constituency.

First Past the Post tends to produce strong governments, which supporters see as an advantage (there is relatively little chance of coalition government), and the only coalitions in the 20th or 21st centuries have happened at times of emergency, usually when one party does not have an overall majority in the House of Commons.

Coalition governments cannot deliver the electoral mandate, because there has to be consensus on policy with other parties. Coalitions could give small parties disproportionate power.

Similarly, smaller parties may be constantly in government by changing their allegiances between larger parties despite having no real mandate themselves.

Coalitions are not formed until after elections, thus parties who people may have chose to vote against rather than for, may end up in government anyway.

Parties seen as 'extreme' by the establishment parties, such as the British National Party, might be able to win seats and gain real political power if they had enough votes nationwide. Some think it would be irresponsible to give 'extremists' the opportunity to have political power. This could be avoided with a minimum exclusion level (e.g. to return 5% of votes). However, such an exclusion would also discriminate against smaller non-'extreme' parties, such as the Green Party.

Low turnout

As in many Western democracies, the effects of voter apathy are a current concern, after a dramatic decline in election turnout recently. Turnout has fallen from 77% in 1992, 71% in 1997 to 61% in the last election. This was a small rise from 2001, which recorded 59%. The main reasons identified for low turnout are:

Lack of variation in the ideologies of the main parties

Decline in partisanship (many voters are no longer permanently loyal to one party)

Reduction in the popularity of various Party leaderships.

Dissatisfaction with parties' record on public services, education, transport etc.

Lack of interest in the election campaign.

Voter apathy due to voters believing their vote will have no effect on the overall outcome. Turnout is inversely proportional to the majority in any seat.

Possible measures to increase turnout include:

Compulsory voting (seen as an extreme solution, not advocated by many)

Electoral reform, towards PR (a policy advocated by the Liberal Democrats)

New forms of voting, e.g., by post, telephone, internet (the scope of postal voting was increased by Labour before the last election). There were several sets of criminal proceedings after the last general election pointing out weaknesses in the postal voting system and resulting in a cooling of enthusiasm for IT and proxy arrangements.

United Kingdom general election, 2010

All 650 seats to the House of Commons

6 May 2010 (2010-05-06)

	First party	Second party	Third party
Leader	David Cameron	Gordon Brown	Nick Clegg
Party	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
			18
Leader since	6 December 2005	24 June 2007	December 2007
Leader's seat	Witney	Kirkcaldy & Cowdenbeath	& Sheffield Hallam
Last election	198 seats, 32.3%	356 seats, 35.3%	62 seats, 22.1%
Seats before	209	349	63
Seats won	305	258	57
Seat change	+96	-91	-6
Popular vote	10,683,787	8,604,358	6,827,938
Percentage	36.1%	29.0%	23.0%
Swing	+3.8%	-6.2%	+1.0%

Previous	Prime	Minister
Gordon		Brown
Labour		
Subsequent	Prime	Minister

David

Cameron

Conservative

A general election was held in the United Kingdom on Thursday 6 May 2010 to elect members to the House of Commons. The general election took place in 649 constituencies across the United Kingdom, under the first-past-the-post system. The Conservative Party under David Cameron won the largest number of votes and seats, but fell short of the 326 seats needed to have an overall majority. It was the first time since 1974, and only the second time since the Second World War, that a British general election returned a hung parliament.

For the first time in a British election, the three main party leaders engaged in a series of televised debates. The third largest party, the Liberal Democrats, achieved a breakthrough in opinion polls after the first debate in which their leader Nick Clegg was widely seen as the strongest performer. However, on polling day itself their share of the vote increased by only 1%, and they suffered a net loss of five seats. Still, this was the Liberal Democrats' largest popular vote since the party's creation in 1988, and they found themselves in a pivotal role in the formation of the new government.

On 11 May, as coalition talks between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats seemed to be drawing to a successful conclusion, Gordon Brown announced his resignation as Prime Minister, marking the end of 13 years of Labour government. This made way for David Cameron to become Prime Minister just one hour after Queen Elizabeth II accepted Brown's resignation. Just after midnight on 12 May 2010, the Liberal Democrats emerged from a meeting of their Parliamentary party and Federal Executive to announce that the coalition deal had been "approved overwhelmingly", meaning that David Cameron would be leading a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

This was the first time since 1979 that none of the three main party leaders had headed a previous general election campaign. 35% of voters supported a party other than Labour or the Conservatives—the highest such figure since the 1918 general election. The Green Party won its first seat in the Commons, and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland won its first seat at the ballot box.

Background

The Prime Minister Gordon Brown visited Buckingham Palace on 6 April and asked the Queen to dissolve Parliament on 12 April, confirming in a live press conference in Downing Street, as had long been speculated, that the election would be held on 6 May, five years since the previous election on 5 May 2005. The election was called on 6 April, and Parliament was dissolved on 12 April for the ensuing campaign. The election took place on 6 May in 649 constituencies across the United Kingdom, under the first-past-the-post system, for seats in the House of Commons. Voting in the Thirsk and Malton constituency was postponed for three weeks because of the death of a candidate. There were reports of electors being prevented from voting as polling stations closed at 10:00 p.m., mainly from insufficient time or electoral staff, but also from a lack of ballot papers.

The governing Labour Party had campaigned to secure a fourth consecutive term in office and to restore support lost since 1997. The Conservative Party sought to gain a dominant position in UK politics after losses in the 1990s, and to replace Labour as the governing party. The Liberal Democrats hoped to make gains from both sides and hoped to hold the balance of power in a hung parliament. Since the televised debates between the three leaders, their poll ratings had risen to the point where many considered the possibility of a Liberal Democrat role in Government. Polls just before election day saw a slight swing from the Liberal Democrats back to Labour and Conservatives, with the majority of final polls falling within one point of Conservatives 36%, Labour 28%, Liberal Democrats 27%. However, record numbers of undecided voters raised uncertainty about the outcome. The Scottish National Party, encouraged by their victory in the 2007 Scottish parliament elections, set themselves a target of 20 MPs and were hoping to find themselves in a balance of power position. Equally, Plaid Cymru sought gains in Wales. Smaller parties who have had successes at local elections and the 2009 European elections (UK Independence Party, Green Party, British National Party) looked to extend their representation to seats in the House of Commons. The Democratic Unionist Party looked to maintain, if not extend, their number of seats, having been the fourth largest party in the House of Commons.

The key dates are as follows:

Monday 12 April	Dissolution of Parliament (the 54th) and campaigning officially began
Tuesday 20 April	Last day to file nomination papers, to register to vote, and to request a postal vote
Thursday 6 May	Polling day
Tuesday 11 May	David Cameron is made Prime Minister through a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.
Tuesday 18 May	New Parliament (the 55th) assembles
Tuesday 25 May	State Opening of Parliament
Thursday 27 May	Voting takes place in the delayed poll in the constituency of Thirsk and Malton

Contesting parties

Main three

All three main parties went into the general election having changed leaders since the last election. David Cameron became Conservative leader in December 2005, replacing Michael Howard. Gordon Brown succeeded Tony Blair as leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister in June 2007. Nick Clegg was elected as leader of the Liberal Democrats in December 2007, succeeding Menzies Campbell who had replaced Charles Kennedy in January 2006. The last time all three main parties went into a general election with new leaders was in the 1979 election, when James Callaghan as Labour leader, Margaret Thatcher for the Conservatives, and David Steel with the then-Liberal Party took to the polls.

The leadership of each party may have implications beyond party popularity at the polls, especially if a hung parliament requires the formation of a coalition or minority government. Tony Blair courted the Liberal Democrats for possible coalition in the 1997 Parliament even though Labour had a clear majority, and similarly Gordon Brown made comments about the possibility of a coalition in January 2010. In 2009, it was reported that senior civil servants were to meet with the Liberal Democrats to discuss their policies, an indication of how seriously the prospect of a hung parliament was being

taken.[18] Nick Clegg[19] and Menzies Campbell had continued the position of Charles Kennedy of not being prepared to form a coalition with either main party and of voting against any Queen's Speech unless there was an unambiguous commitment in it to introduce proportional representation.

David Cameron has made a pitch to "Middle England"—voters who supposedly abandoned the Conservative Party after 1992 for Labour or the Liberal Democrats.

Others

Other parties with representation at the previous general election at Westminster include the Scottish National Party from Scotland and Plaid Cymru from Wales, and Respect – The Unity Coalition and Health Concern, each of which held one Parliamentary seat from England. Since that election, the Scottish National Party have won the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections and currently control the Scottish Government and also won the largest share of the 2009 European Parliament election vote in Scotland. In Wales, the Labour Party remained the largest party in the Welsh Assembly, though Plaid Cymru increased their share of the vote and formed a coalition government with Labour.

The sole Ulster Unionist Party MP subsequently resigned from the party, leaving them with no representation at Westminster. This shift continued trends in both the nationalist and unionist communities that had been seen in the previous two elections, and was also replicated in the 2007 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In 2008, the DUP announced their intention to sit with the Conservative Party in parliament, and in 2009 the UUP and the Conservative Party announced they had formed an electoral alliance: the two parties will field joint candidates for future elections under the banner of "Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force".

Many constituencies were contested by other, smaller parties. Parties that won no representatives at Westminster in 2005 but have seats in the devolved assemblies or European Parliament included the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, the Progressive Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, the British National Party, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), and the Green parties in the UK: the Green Party of England and Wales, the Scottish Green Party, and the Green Party in Northern Ireland. In 2009, Nigel Farage announced his intention to resign as UKIP leader to focus his attention on becoming a

Member of Parliament. Farage was replaced by Lord Pearson of Rannoch, elected by party members, whose stated intention was for the electoral support of UKIP to force a hung parliament. The Green Party of England and Wales voted to have a position of leader for the first time; the first leadership election was won by Caroline Lucas, who successfully contested the constituency of Brighton Pavilion.

In addition to a wide number of smaller parties which had no parliamentary representation, a new loose coalition contested a general election for the first time. The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), is a grouping of left-wing parties that participated in the 2009 European Parliament elections under the name of No2EU; members include the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party, the Socialist Alliance, Socialist Resistance, and is supported by some members of UNISON, the National Union of Teachers, the University and College Union, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, and the Public and Commercial Services Union. Several members of these unions agreed to run as candidates under the TUSC banner. However, some former members of NO2EU, such as the Liberal Party and the Communist Party of Britain, chose not to participate in the TUSC campaign. The coalition did not run candidates against left-wing Labour or Respect candidates.

MPs declining re-election

This election had an unusually high number of MPs choosing not to seek re-election with more standing down than did so at the 1945 election (which on account of the extraordinary wartime circumstances came ten years after the preceding election). This has been attributed to the expenses scandal and the fact that redundancy-style payments for departing MPs may be scrapped after the election.

In all, 149 MPs (100 Labour, 35 Conservatives, 7 Liberal Democrats, 2 Independents, 1 Independent Conservative and 1 member each from Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, and the Social Democratic and Labour Party) decided not to contest the election.

Boundary changes

The notional results of the 2005 election, if they had taken place with the new boundaries Each of the four national Boundary Commissions is required by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended by the Boundary Commissions Act 1992) to conduct a general review of all the constituencies in its part of the United Kingdom every eight to twelve years to ensure the size and composition of constituencies are as fair as possible. Based on the Rallings and Thrasher studies using ward by ward data from local elections and the 2005 general election, the new boundaries to be used in 2010 would have returned nine fewer Labour MPs had they been in place at the previous election; given that there are to be four more seats in the next parliament this notionally reduces Labour's majority from 66 to 44.

Pursuant to Boundary Commission for England recommendations, the number of seats in England increased by four, and numerous changes were made to the existing constituency boundaries.

Northern Ireland continued to elect 18 MPs, but minor changes were made to the eastern constituencies in accordance with the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission's recommendations. For the first time, these changes include the splitting of an electoral ward between two constituencies.

Following the recommendations of the Boundary Commission for Wales, the total number of seats is to remain at 40, although new seats have been recommended by radical redrawing of boundaries in Clwyd and Gwynedd: Arfon and Dwyfor Meirionnydd replace Caernarfon and Meirionnydd Nant Conwy respectively; Aberconwy replaces Conwy. Currently Welsh constituencies have electorates on average around 14,000 smaller than their counterparts in England.

Scotland saw its most recent large-scale review completed in 2004, so its 59 constituencies remain the same as at the 2005 general election.

Campaign

April



An election sign put up by the Scottish Labour Party in Stornoway in the Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituency, photographed on 7 April 2010, the first full day of campaigning

The prospective Labour candidate for Moray, Stuart Maclennan, was sacked after making offensive comments on his Twitter page, referring to elderly voters as "coffin dodgers", voters in the North of Scotland as "teuchters", and insulting politicians such as David Cameron, Nick Clegg, John Bercow and Diane Abbott.

The UKIP candidate for Thirsk and Malton—John Boakes—died, causing the election in the constituency to be postponed until 27 May.

Philip Lardner, the Conservative candidate for North Ayrshire and Arran was suspended from the party for comments he made about homosexuality on his website, describing it as not "normal behaviour". Andrew Fulton, chair of the Scottish Conservative Party called the comments "deeply offensive and unacceptable", adding, "These views have no place in the modern Conservative party." However, he would still appear as a Conservative candidate because it was too late to remove his name from the ballot paper.

2,378 postal voters in Bristol West were wrongly sent ballot papers for Bristol East by mistake. Bristol City Council officials asked people to tear up the wrong papers and said "Every effort will be made to ensure delivery [of new ballot papers] by 30 April."

Wikinews has related news: "Bigoted woman": controversial Gordon Brown remarks caught on air

Gordon Brown privately described a 65-year-old pensioner, Gillian Duffy, from Rochdale, Greater Manchester, as a "bigoted woman" after she asked him about vulnerable people not receiving benefits because non-vulnerable people are receiving them, including "all these Eastern Europeans what are coming in". Brown's remarks were recorded by a Sky News microphone he was still wearing, and widely broadcast. Soon after the incident, Brown talked to Jeremy Vine live on BBC Radio 2 where he publicly apologised to Duffy. Subsequently Brown visited Duffy in her house for 45 minutes in order to apologise in person. Upon emerging, he described himself as a "penitent sinner", while Duffy refused to speak to the press and would not shake hands with him in front of the cameras. She said the incident had left her feeling more sad than angry and that she would not be voting for Labour or any other party.

The Scottish National Party failed in a court action to ban the broadcast in Scotland of the final party leaders debate. They had argued that "the corporation [the BBC] had breached its rules on impartiality by excluding the SNP." The judge, Lady Smith, ruled that "the SNP's case 'lacks the requisite precision and clarity'" and added she could not "conclude the BBC had breached impartiality rules." Additionally, broadcasting regulator Ofcom ruled that it had not "upheld complaints received from the SNP and Plaid Cymru about The First Election Debate broadcast on ITV1 on Thursday 15 April 2010."

The leader of the UK Independence Party, Lord Pearson, wrote an open letter to Somerset newspapers, asking voters to support Conservative candidates, rather than UKIP candidates in the Somerton and Frome, Taunton Deane and Wells constituencies. This action was criticised by UKIP candidates who refused to stand down.

Labour candidate for Bristol East and former MP Kerry McCarthy revealed information about postal votes cast in the constituency on Twitter. Avon and Somerset police said they were "looking into a possible alleged breach of electoral law." Bristol City Council stated that "This is a criminal matter and [it] will be for the police to decide what action to take."

The former Prime Minister Tony Blair returned to the campaign trail for Labour, visiting a polyclinic in Harrow West, after a troubled Labour campaign.

Postal voters in the marginal Vale of Glamorgan constituency had to be issued with new ballot papers after mistakenly being told they did not have to sign applications for postal votes.

May

In Hornsey and Wood Green constituency, 749 postal voters were sent ballot papers "which asked voters to pick three candidates instead of one." Haringey Council had to deliver new ballot papers by hand.

The Metropolitan Police launched an investigation into allegations of bogus voter registration after revelations that fictitious names had been added to the electoral roll in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It was also reported that a last minute surge in applications to vote before the 20 April deadline had led to 5,000 names being added to the register without being checked, enough to sway the outcome of the election.

The Labour candidate for North West Norfolk, Manish Sood, described Gordon Brown as Britain's worst ever Prime Minister. The comments, which he repeated to a variety of news outlets, took attention away from the previous day's speech by Brown to Citizens UK, widely described as his best of the campaign.

A Conservative Party activist in Peterborough was arrested after alleged incidents of postal voting fraud.

Simon Bennett resigned as the head of the British National Party's online operation, then redirected its website to his own website on which he launches an attack against the party's leadership.



Polling station in Camberwell in the Camberwell and Peckham constituency

On the morning of polling day, the former leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, was injured when a light aircraft in which he was a passenger crashed near Brackley,

Northamptonshire. There were also several reports of voters being locked out of polling stations in Sheffield Hallam, Manchester and Leeds, "and police said one London polling station was open at 2230 BST." Counting in Londonderry was also suspended around 2300 UTC, after a car which was abandoned outside the counting centre caused a bomb scare.

The counts for the Foyle and East Londonderry constituencies were suspended due to a security alert.

The first major shift occurred when Peter Robinson, incumbent First Minister of Northern Ireland, lost his seat to Naomi Long of the Alliance Party.

Debates

Following a campaign by Sky News and with agreement of the party leaders. it was announced on 21 December 2009 that there would be three leaders' debates, each in primetime, and a subsequent announcement in March 2010 that a debate between the financial spokesmen of the three main parties, Alistair Darling, George Osborne and Vince Cable would be held on 29 March.

Date	Host	Location	Moderator	Subject	Highlights
15 April	ITV	Manchester	Alastair Stewart	Domestic policy	Instant polling after the event unanimously declared Nick Clegg the winner. This first debate caused a large, immediate, and unexpected impact on opinion polls in favour of the Liberal Democrats.
22 April	Sky News	Bristol	Adam Boulton	International affairs	Nick Clegg and David Cameron came out best in the instant polls with Gordon Brown very closely behind. Nick Clegg, having received such a surge after the first debate, was judged to have fended off the Labour Party and Conservative Party attacks. Gordon

29
April BBC Birmingham David Dimbleby Economy and taxes

Brown was judged to have drastically improved his performance, and David Cameron was judged to have overcome the nerves that commentators believed affected him in the First Debate. In the build-up, the Liberal Democrats were affected by claims Clegg had received secret donations from businessmen, although he subsequently released his financial statements to show that no improper conduct had occurred.

In the third and final poll, David Cameron was widely regarded as the party leader who made the best impression to the audience at home.[At the end of the debating night, the Conservatives had gained a 5% lead over the Labour Party.

The SNP insisted that as the leading political party in Scotland in the latest opinion poll, it should be included in any debate broadcast in Scotland. On 22 December 2009, the UKIP leader, Lord Pearson stated that his party should also be included. Following a decision by the BBC Trust not to uphold a complaint from the SNP and Plaid Cymru over their exclusion from the planned BBC debate, the SNP announced on 25 April that they would proceed with legal action over the debate scheduled for 29 April. The party said it was not trying to stop the broadcast but it wanted an SNP politician included for balance. The SNP lost the case, in a judgement delivered on 28 April.

Polling

Since each MP is elected separately by the first past the post voting system, it is impossible to precisely project a clear election outcome from overall UK shares of the vote. Not only can individual constituencies vary markedly from overall voting trends,

but individual countries and regions within the UK may have a very different electoral contest that is not properly reflected in overall share of the vote figures.

Therefore, the first past the post system means that the number of MPs elected may not reflect the overall popular vote share across the parties. Thus, it is not necessarily the party with the largest share of the popular vote that ends up with the largest number of MPs. (See details of the elections in 1951 and February 1974) Since 1935 no party has achieved more than 50% of the popular vote in a UK general election. The voting system favours parties with relatively concentrated support: a widely distributed vote leaves a party at risk of getting a large vote share but doing poorly in terms of numbers of seats (as the SDP-Liberal Alliance did in the 1980s), whereas parties with localised votes can win seats with a relatively small share of the vote.

That said, in previous elections, approximate forecasting of results were achieved by assuming that the swing in each individual constituency will be the same across the country. This system, known as uniform national swing (UNS) is used by much of the media in the UK to assess and extrapolate electoral fortunes from opinion poll data, though there has been criticism that such predictions may be naive and unreliable, even from providers of such data. By using UNS projections, several media commentators and politicians have suggested that significant swings towards the Liberal Democrats in the opinion polls may not necessarily amount to significant gains in terms of parliamentary seats, including predictions that even if the Liberal Democrats had the most votes, and Labour the least, it could be the case that Labour retains the most seats while the Lib Dems have the fewest.

Normally governments can easily survive for a full parliamentary term on a majority of more than 20 seats over all other parties. Below that level there is a danger of by-elections and MPs crossing the floor of the House reducing the government to a minority such that it would be at increased risk of losing a vote of no confidence.

Polling since 2005

Immediately following the previous general election, the Labour party held a double-digit lead in opinion polls. However, over the course of 2005, this lead was eroded somewhat. By December 2005, the Conservative party showed its first small leads in opinion polls

following the controversial 90 days detention proposals and the election of David Cameron to the leadership of the Conservative party.

In early 2006, opinion polls were increasingly mixed with small leads given alternately to Labour and Conservative. From the May 2006 local elections, in which Labour suffered significant losses, the Conservatives took a small single-digit lead in opinion polls. Labour regained the lead in June 2007 following the resignation of Tony Blair and the appointment of Gordon Brown as prime minister. From November 2007, the Conservatives again took the lead and, from then, extended their lead into double digits, particularly in response to the MPs' expenses scandal, although there was some evidence that the lead narrowed slightly towards the end of 2009. By the end of February 2010, Ipsos MORI, ICM, YouGov and ComRes polls had all found a sufficient narrowing of the Conservative lead for media speculation about a hung parliament to return.

From 15 April 2010, following the first televised debate of the party leaders, however, polling data changed dramatically, with the Lib Dem vote proportion rising to 28–33%, and the Conservative vote proportion falling. In some polls, the Liberal Democrats took the lead from the Conservatives. Under UNS projections, this made a hung parliament highly probable, if Lib Dem performance had persisted.

After the second debate on 22 April the polls, on average, placed the Conservatives in the lead on 33%, the Liberal Democrats in second on 30% and Labour in third on 28%. If these polls had reflected the election day results on a uniform swing nationwide, Labour would have had the most seats in a hung Parliament.

The following graph shows polls recorded over the entire period by ICM:

Conservative Labour Liberal Democrats Other

The following graph shows YouGov poll results since the calling of the general election on 6 April 2010:

Exit poll

At 10 pm on election day, coinciding with the closure of the polls, the results of an exit poll collected for the BBC, Sky and ITV news services were announced. Data were gathered from individuals at 130 polling stations around the country. The results of the poll initially suggested a hung parliament with the Conservative Party 19 seats from a controlling majority; this was later adjusted to 21 seats. The distribution of seats amongst the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats and other parties was initially suggested to be 307, 255, 59 and 29 respectively, although the seat numbers were later changed to 303, 251, 69, and 27 respectively.

Initial reaction to the exit poll by various commentators was of surprise at the apparent poor prospects for the Liberal Democrats because it was odds with many opinion polls undertaken in the previous weeks. However, the actual results showed that the exit poll was a good predictor.

A later BBC Exit poll (05:36 BST) predicted the Conservatives on 306, 20 short of an overall majority, Labour on 262, and Liberal Democrats on 55.

Newspaper endorsements

Main article: Newspaper endorsements in the United Kingdom general election, 2010

National newspapers in the United Kingdom traditionally endorse political parties before a general election. The following table shows which parties major papers are endorsing (or blank if they have not declared a preference).

The Independent and The Guardian advocated tactical voting to maximise the chance of a Liberal Democrat – Labour coalition, in order to make electoral reform a possibility.

Marginal seats

Further information: Conservative targets for the 2010 United Kingdom general election, Labour targets for the 2010 United Kingdom general election, and Liberal Democrat targets for the 2010 United Kingdom general election

Following the Boundary Commissions' reports recommending changes to seats in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, various estimates have been made of the electoral effect of the changes in each constituency. The most respected of these estimates is The Media Guide to the New Parliamentary Constituencies compiled and edited by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, which was published in February 2007. The website UKPollingReport has also compiled estimates. The various estimates differ in detail.

Arising out of those estimates, lists of the most marginal seats were compiled. They were the seats where a party needed to overturn the lowest percentage majority to win the seat. These were not necessarily the seats where it was easiest to do so, or the only seats that the party were actually targeting.

Results

At 9:41am on 7 May, the BBC confirmed a "hung parliament", as it was by then impossible for the Conservative party to gain the number of seats needed to form a majority government. (326 or 323 for a majority, as the five Sinn Féin MPs are expected to boycott the House of Commons. At that time the Conservatives stood at 290 seats, Labour at 247 and Liberal Democrats at 51.) There is one constituency seat that, due to the unexpected death of one of the candidates, will be contested on 27 May and is currently unseated.

Of the 532 seats contested in England (a final seat will be contested on 27 May), the Conservatives won an absolute majority with 61 seats more than all other parties combined, and secured an average swing of 5.6% from Labour.

Each of Scotland's 59 seats was won by the party that won it at the 2005 election, with Labour regaining the two seats they lost in by-elections since 2005. There was a swing to Labour from the Conservatives of 0.8% (with Labour increasing its share of the vote by 2.5% and the Conservatives increasing by just 0.9%) This left the Conservatives with just a single MP representing a Scottish constituency.

There were 40 seats contested in Wales. The Conservative share rose from three to eight, taking one from the Liberal Democrats and four from Labour. Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru gained one extra seat, Arfon, from Labour. Overall, Labour lost four seats but remained the biggest party, with 26.

There were 18 seats contested in Northern Ireland. Both Irish nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and SDLP, held their seats. The unionist parties, DUP and UUP (the latter in an electoral pact with the Conservatives), lost one seat each. This left the nationalist parties with eight seats, the unionist parties with eight seats (all DUP), the Alliance with one seat and an independent unionist with one seat. It is the first time since the Partition of Ireland that unionist parties failed to secure a majority of Northern Ireland's Westminster seats in a general election.

Political Party	Candidates	Seats	Seats Gained	Seats Lost	Net Change in seats	% of Seats	% of Votes	Number of Votes	change in % of vote
Conservative	631	305	100	3	+96	47.0	36.1	10,683,787	+3.8
Labour	631	258	3	94	-91	39.7	29.0	8,604,358	-6.2
Liberal Democrat	631	57	8	13	-5	8.8	23.0	6,827,938	+1.0
UKIP	572	0	0	0	0	0	3.1	917,832	+0.9
BNP	338	0	0	0	0	0	1.9	563,743	+1.2
SNP	59	6	0	0	0	0.9	1.7	491,386	+0.1
Green	310	1	1	0	+1	0.2	1.0	285,616	-0.1
Sinn Féin	17	5	0	0	0	0.8	0.6	171,942	-0.1
Democratic Unionist	16	8	0	1	-1	1.2	0.6	168,216	-0.3
Plaid Cymru	40	3	1	0	+1	0.5	0.6	165,394	-0.1
SDLP	18	3	0	0	0	0.5	0.4	110,970	-0.1
Conservatives and Unionists	17	0	0	1	-1	0	0.3	102,361	-0.1
English Democrats	107	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	64,826	0.2

Alliance	18	1	1	0	+1	0.2	0.1	42,762	0.0
Respect	10	0	0	1	-1	0	0.1	33,251	-0.1
Traditional Unionist Voice	10	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	26,300	N/A
Speaker	1	1	1	1	0	0.2	0.1	22,860	0.0
Independent - Rodney Connor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	21,300	N/A'
Independent - Sylvia Hermon	1	1	1	0	+1	0.2	0.1	21,181	N/A
Christian	71	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	18,623	+0.1
Scottish Green	20	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	16,827	0.0
Health Concern	1	0	0	1	-1	0	0.1	16,150	0.0
Trade Unionist & Socialist	41	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	12,275	N/A
National Front	17	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	10,784	0.0
Buckinghamshire Campaign for Democracy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	10,331	N/A
Monster Raving Loony	27	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	7,510	0.0
Socialist Labour	24	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	7,219	-0.1
Blaenau Gwent People's Voice	1	0	0	1	-1	0	0.0	6,458	-0.1
Christian Peoples	11	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	6,276	0.0
Mebyon Kernow	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	5,379	0.0

Liberal	5	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	5,363	-0.1
Lincolnshire Independents	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	5,311	N/A
Mansfield Independent Forum	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	4,339	N/A
Green (NI)	4	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	3,542	0.0
Socialist Alternative	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	3,298	0.0
Scottish Socialist	10	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	3,157	-0.1
People Before Profit	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	2,936	N/A
Trust	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	2,699	N/A
Local Liberals People Before Politics	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	1,964	N/A
Alliance for Green Socialism	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	1,581	0.0
Social Democrat	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	1,551	N/A
Pirate	9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	1,340	N/A
Communist	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	947	0.0
Workers' Revolutionary	7	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	738	0.0
Peace	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	737	0.0
New Millennium Bean Party	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	558	0.0
	649				Turnout	65.1		29,653,638	

Notable defeated incumbents

Although an unusually large number of MPs stood down prior to the election, there were several notable cases of incumbent MPs being defeated.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland a swing of more than 20% resulted in First Minister Peter Robinson losing his Belfast East seat to the Alliance Party's Naomi Long, giving Alliance its first ever seat in Westminster.

Reg Empey, a sitting MLA and leader of the UUP/Conservative alliance, lost standing for the first time in South Antrim to former Mid Ulster MP, William McCrea of the DUP. Thus both leaders of the main Unionist parties in Northern Ireland failing to win seats. As of May 2010 the Ulster Unionist Party thus has no MPs at Westminster.

Lady Sylvia Hermon retained her seat in North Down, significantly increasing her percentage of the popular vote despite a slightly lower voter turnout and her defection from the UUP/Conservative alliance to stand as an independent.

SDLP party leader Margaret Ritchie (SDLP) won her first seat, succeeding Eddie McGrady, also of the SDLP, who retired. All of the Sinn Féin and SDLP incumbents held their seats, although Sinn Féin's Michelle Gildernew retained her seat in Fermanagh & South Tyrone by only four votes over the independent unionist unity candidate, Rodney Connor, after three recounts.

Liberal Democrats

Lembit Öpik lost his Montgomeryshire seat having previously held a 7000-vote majority
Science spokesman Evan Harris lost Oxford West and Abingdon by 176 votes

Communities and Local Government spokesman Julia Goldsworthy lost Camborne and Redruth by 66 votes

Heritage spokesman Richard Younger-Ross lost Newton Abbot to the Conservatives by 523 votes

Susan Kramer lost her Richmond Park seat to environmental journalist Zac Goldsmith

Health spokesman Sandra Gidley lost Romsey and Southampton North by 125 votes

Labour ministers

Former Labour Home Secretaries Jacqui Smith (Redditch) and Charles Clarke (Norwich South) lost to the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats respectively. The following incumbent ministers also lost their seats:

Minister of State for Third Sector - Angela Evans Smith (Basildon)

Minister of State for the Armed Forces - Bill Rammell (Harlow)

Minister of State for Health Services - Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire)

Minister of State for Health - Phil Hope (Corby)

Solicitor General for England and Wales - Vera Baird (Redcar)

Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform - Jim Knight (South Dorset)

Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury - Sarah McCarthy-Fry (Portsmouth North)

Lord Commissioner of HM Treasury - Bob Blizard (Waveney)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities - Shahid Malik (Dewsbury)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department for Energy and Climate Change - David Kidney (Stafford)

Minister of State for Public Health - Gillian Merron (Lincoln)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Equality - Michael (Jabez) Foster (Hastings and Rye)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development - Michael Foster (Worcester)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport - Chris Mole (Ipswich)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport - Paul Clark (Gillingham and Rainham)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for Disabled People - Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health Services - Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth)

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice - Claire Ward (Watford) all also lost their seats.

Cabinet Office minister Dawn Butler (Brent Central; lost to Sarah Teather after both their seats (Brent South and Brent East) were abolished in boundary changes

In addition, former Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform and Minister for London Tony McNulty lost Harrow East.

Ed Balls held his seat in Morley and Outwood by just 1,001, despite much anticipation of a "Portillo moment".^[115] Former junior transport minister and actress Glenda Jackson retained Hampstead and Kilburn by just 42 votes.

Others

Respect MP George Galloway chose not to contest his Bethnal Green & Bow seat, instead challenging Minister of State for Farming and the Environment Jim Fitzpatrick in the nearby Poplar and Limehouse constituency. Galloway lost, leaving the House of Commons after 23 years as an MP.

Richard Taylor of Independent Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern lost his Wyre Forest seat to the Conservatives.

Green leader Caroline Lucas won Brighton Pavilion.

BNP leader Nick Griffin finished in third place after a heavy loss in Barking to Labour MP Margaret Hodge.

Parliamentary demographics

The election resulted in an increase in the number of MPs from ethnic minorities from 14 to 27, including the first black, Asian female Conservative MPs, Helen Grant and Priti Patel, and the first female Muslim MPs, Rushanara Ali, Shabana Mahmood and Yasmin Qureshi. The number of female MPs rose to 141, an increase from 19.5% to 22% of all MPs, and the highest ever total; the number of female Conservative MPs rose from 18 to 48.

Effect of the expenses scandal

The predicted backlash from the 2009 expenses scandal of a rise in the number of successful Independents in the election failed to materialise.

Many of the MPs who were most prominently caught up in the scandal decided, or were ordered, not to stand for re-election in 2010. Among them were Margaret Moran, Elliot Morley, David Chaytor, Quentin Davies, Nicholas and Ann Winterton,^[128] Derek

Conway, John Gummer, Douglas Hogg, Anthony Steen, Peter Viggers, Julie Kirkbride and her husband Andrew McKay.

Among those implicated who did stand in the 2010 election, there were some notable losses. Lembit Öpik was defeated in his Montgomeryshire constituency on a 13% swing. Öpik had claimed a £40 summons charge for non-payment of Council Tax, although media coverage of the loss placed more emphasis on the politician's colourful personal life. Former Home Secretary Jacqui Smith lost her Redditch seat, following a 9.2% swing to the Conservatives. Smith's expenses, which included two pornographic films, had been described as "near fraudulent" by the chairman of the committee on Standards in Public life. Former Home Office minister Tony McNulty lost Harrow East to the Conservatives on an 8% swing. McNulty had repaid over £13,000 after claiming expenses on a second home, occupied by his parents, which was 8 miles away from his primary residence. Ann Keen lost Brentford and Isleworth on a 6% swing, but her husband Alan Keen retained Feltham and Heston. The couple were criticised for claiming for a second home in central London while rarely staying in their nearby constituency home. Shahid Malik lost his Dewsbury seat on a 5.9% swing to the Conservatives. Malik had been required to repay some of his expense claims and, at the time of the election, was under investigation for other claims. Conservative David Heathcoat-Amory lost Wells to the Liberal Democrats on a 4% swing. Heathcoat-Amory was criticised for claiming manure on expenses. Phil Hope, who repaid over £40,000 in expenses, was defeated in his Corby constituency on a 3.3% swing.

Hazel Blears suffered a huge 9.4% swing in her Salford and Eccles constituency, but was still comfortably re-elected. Blears was ordered by Gordon Brown to pay more than £13,000 capital gains tax which she had avoided by "flipping" the designation of her main residence. Conversely, Brian Jenkins lost his Tamworth seat on a 9.5% swing despite being described as a "saint" by the Daily Telegraph newspaper on account of his low expenses.

Independents supported by the Jury Team or the Independent Network, support networks who both attempted to select and promote high quality Independents who had signed up for the so called Nolan Principles of public life, set out in the Committee on Standards in Public Life, failed to have any significant impact, particularly Esther Rantzen's bid to

take the Luton South constituency on an anti-sleaze platform, eventually polling in 4th place with just 4.4% of the vote. Similarly, while not an Independent, the UKIP Leader Nigel Farage failed in his attempt to unseat Speaker John Bercow, heavily criticised for his handling of the expenses scandal. Going against the normal political convention, Farage decided to stand in the Speaker's seat, which is normally not contested by major parties. His bid failed after he polled third in the vote for the Buckingham constituency with 17.4%, behind the re-elected speaker with 47.3%, although an Independent John Stevens, standing on the Buckinghamshire Campaign for Democracy ticket, polled second with 21.4%.

Voting problems

Problems occurred with voting in various areas of the country, a situation which was condemned by politicians of various parties. Jenny Watson, chair of the Electoral Commission, the independent body that oversees the electoral process, was forced on to television to defend preparations and procedures. The Electoral Commission has announced it will be carrying out a "thorough investigation".

In Chester there were reports that 600 registered voters were unable to vote because the electoral roll had not been updated, while in Hackney, Islington, Leeds, Lewisham, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield long queues led to many voters being turned away and unable to vote as the 10 pm deadline arrived. Some dissatisfied voters staged sit-ins to protest against what some of them had called "disenfranchisement". In Liverpool, higher than expected turnout meant several polling stations ran out of ballot papers, with defeated council leader Warren Bradley stating that some residents were unable to cast their votes.

In parts of Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg's Sheffield Hallam seat it was reported that students from the city's two universities were placed in separate queues from 'local' residents, who were given priority, resulting in many students being unable to cast their votes.

Just days after the election Clegg spoke at a Take Back Parliament rally saying the results showed the British system is broken and needs fixing, while vowing the voices of the

protesters would be heard. The rally demanded Clegg affirm his promise to push for "democratic and proportional representation of the British public".

Because of closure of United Kingdom airspace as a result of the Icelandic eruption, potential expat voters in New Zealand were denied a vote when postal voting papers arrived too late to be returned to the UK., although Australian broadcaster SBS suggested that given the extremely tight timetabling of overseas votes, there is very little chance that voting papers [for voters outside Europe] will be received, let alone returned, in time to be counted.

Post-election events

When it became clear that no party would achieve an overall majority the three main party leaders made public statements offering to discuss the options for forming the next government with the other parties.

On 11 May 2010, as coalition talks between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats seemed to be drawing to a successful conclusion, Gordon Brown announced that he was resigning as Prime Minister and also as Labour leader. He then left Downing Street, accompanied by his wife and children driving to Buckingham Palace where he tendered his resignation to the Queen and advised her to call for David Cameron. This made way for David Cameron to become Prime Minister just one hour after the Queen had accepted Brown's resignation. In his first address outside 10 Downing Street, he announced his intention to form a coalition government, the first since the Second World War, with the Liberal Democrats. As one of his first moves, Cameron appointed Nick Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister.

Just after midnight on 12 May 2010, the Liberal Democrats emerged from a meeting of their Parliamentary party and Federal Executive to announce that the coalition deal had been "approved overwhelmingly", meaning that David Cameron would be leading a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

On 12 May 2010, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats jointly published the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement laying out the terms of the coalition deal.

ELECTION ANALYSIS

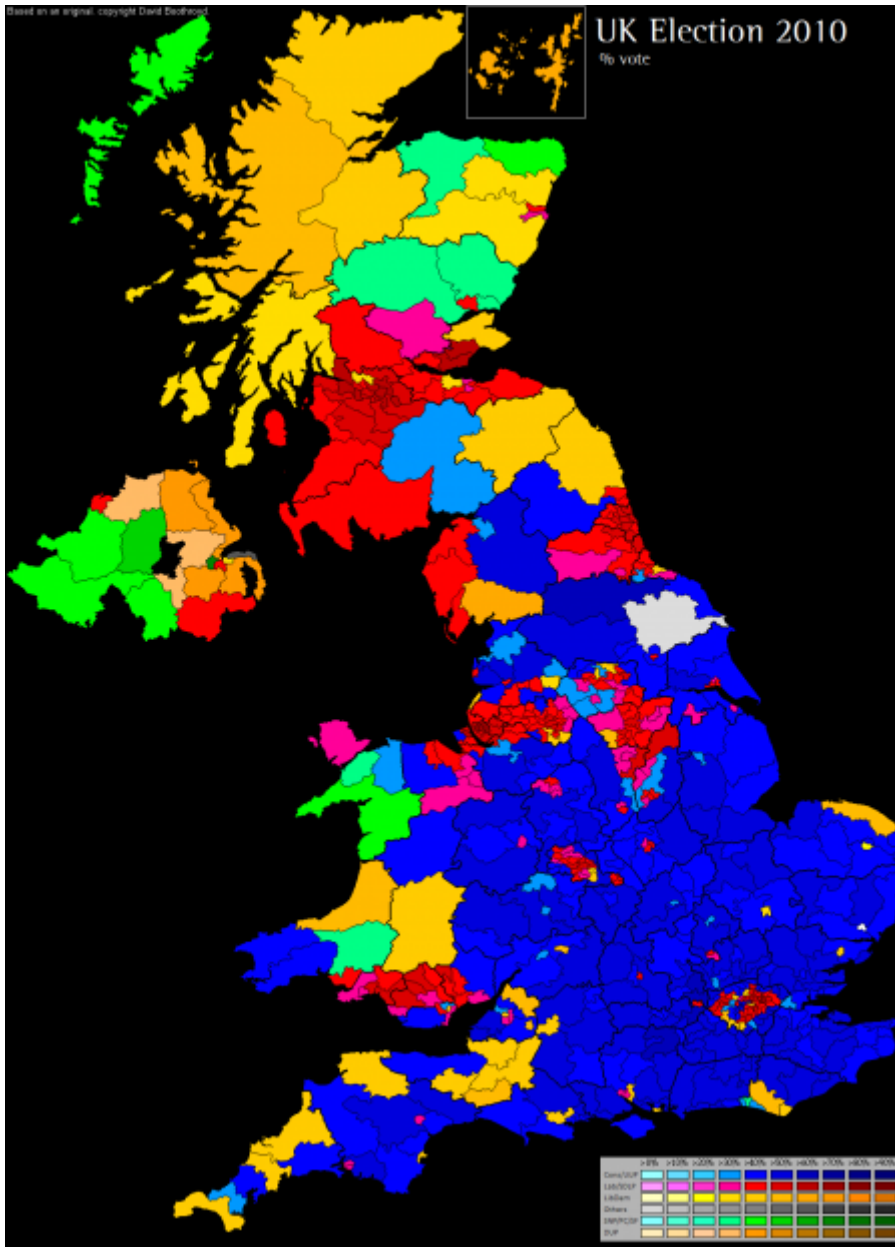
The United Kingdom's general election last night, on May 6, is certainly one of the most interesting and poignant election in a longtime, beating out, in my mind, even Obama's 2008 election. Even now, nobody knows what the hell happened and what will happen. It was an unpredictable wild contest.

All but one of the 650 constituencies up for election are in, only Thirsk and Malton, where a UKIP candidate died before the poll, will vote later, on May 27. Turnout was 65%, up around 4% since 2005. There were long queues at certain polling stations in places such as Sheffield, where the local returning officer closed the door at 22:00 and shut out some people from voting. In other places, certain voters were issued with ballots at 22:00 and allowed to vote after the legal closing time. Some stations ran out of ballots, or had problems because uni students turned out to vote without their voter card. The chaos at certain stations led to scenes of anger by shut-out voters, who tried to block ballot boxes from exiting the station to go to the count centre, and the BBC was also quite angry at the situation. A reform of the polling booths law is likely to come up soon.

The results are as follows, excluding Thirsk and Malton, with changes on **2005 notionals**, excluding by-elections:

Conservatives and Speaker	36.11%	(+3.8%)	winning	306	seats	(+97)
Labour	29.02%	(-6.2%)	winning	258	seats	(-91)
Liberal Democrats	23.03%	(+1.0%)	winning	57	seats	(-5)
UK Independence Party	3.10%	(+0.9%)	winning	0	seats	(nc)
British National Party	1.90%	(+1.2%)	winning	0	seats	(nc)
Scottish National Party	1.66%	(+0.1%)	winning	6	seats	(nc)
Greens	0.96%	(-0.1%)	winning	1	seat	(+1)
Sinn Féin	0.58%	(-0.1%)	winning	5	seats	(nc)
Democratic Unionist Party	0.57%	(-0.3%)	winning	8	seats	(-1)
Plaid Cymru	0.56%	(-0.1%)	winning	3	seats	(+1)
Social Democratic & Labour Party	0.37%	(-0.1%)	winning	3	seats	(nc)

Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force	0.35%	(-0.1%)	winning	0	seats	(-1)
English Democrats	0.22%	(+0.2%)	winning	0	seats	(nc)
Alliance Party	0.14%	(+0.0%)	winning	1	seat	(+1)
Respect-Unity Coalition	0.11%	(-0.1%)	winning	0	seats	(-1)
Traditional Unionist Voice	0.09%	(+0.1%)	winning	0	seats	(nc)
Christian Party	0.06%	(+0.1%)	winning	0	seats	(-1)
Independent Community and Health Concern	0.05%	(+0.0%)	winning	0	seats	(-1)
Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition	0.04%	(+0.0%)	winning	0	seats	(nc)
Scottish Socialist Party	0.01%	(-0.2%)	winning	0	seats	(nc)
All others	1.08%	(+0.0%)	winning	1	seat	(nc)



There are a few general discernible trends in this election, but the major trend is that the election was awfully local. There were wild swings to and from certain parties in various parts of the country, some safe Labour seats fell to the Tories while some marginal Labour seats held on. Some seats which should never have fallen did, and some seats which should have fallen did not. The national swing is 5%, but it was very far from a universal swing (another shot in the back of the classic UNS), with some very low swings in some areas and a high number of seats bucking the trend. A look at those areas later on.

The discernible trends in this election are that Labour held up better than expected, and that Cleggmania died out badly and the LibDems had a rather bad night after the weeks of euphoria, which didn't really die off at any point during the campaign. The daily pollsters did very badly, but the exit pollsters got it almost spot on down to the last seat numbers, and UNS didn't fail as badly as expected (partly the result, I'm sure, of the poor LibDem result). What the pollsters did get right, however, is that the Tories, while largest party by far, lack an overall majority of seats and the next Parliament will be a hung one: the first since February 1974.

To begin the actual analysis, here are the results by major regions:

England: Con 39.6% (297), Lab 28.1% (191), LD 24.2% (43), UKIP 3.5%, BNP 2.1%,
GRN 1% (1)

East Midlands: Con 41.2% (31), Lab 29.8% (15), LD 20.8% (0), UKIP 3.3%, BNP
3.2%, GRN 0.5%

Eastern: Con 47.1% (52), LD 24.1% (5), Lab 19.6% (2), UKIP 4.3%, BNP 2.1%, GRN
1.5%

London: Lab 36.6% (38), Con 34.5% (28), LD 22.1% (7), UKIP 1.7%, GRN 1.6%, BNP
1.5%

North-East: Lab 43.6% (25), Con 23.7% (2), LD 23.6% (2), BNP 4.4%, UKIP 2.7%,
GRN 0.3%

North-West: Lab 39.5% (47), Con 31.7% (22), LD 21.6% (6), UKIP 3.2%, BNP 2.1%,
GRN 0.5%

South-East: Con 49.9% (75), LD 26.2% (4), Lab 16.2% (4), UKIP 4.1%, GRN 1.4% (1),
BNP 0.7%

South-West: Con 42.8% (36), LD 34.7% (15), Lab 15.4% (4), UKIP 4.5%, GRN 1.1%,
BNP 0.8%

West Midlands: Con 39.5% (33), Lab 30.6% (24), LD 20.5% (2), UKIP 4%, BNP 2.8%,
ICHC 0.6%, GRN 0.6%

Yorkshire and the Humber: Lab 34.7% (32), Con 32.5% (18), LD 23% (3), BNP 4.4%,
UKIP 2.8%, GRN 0.9%

Northern Ireland: SF 25.5% (5), DUP 25% (8), SDLP 16.5% (3), UCUNF 15.2% (0),

OTH 7.1% (1), APNI 6.3% (1), TUV 3.9%, GRN 0.5%
Scotland: Lab 42% (41), SNP 19.9% (6), LD 18.9% (11), Con 16.7% (1), UKIP 0.7%,
GRN 0.7%, BNP 0.4%
Wales: Lab 36.2% (26), Con 26.1% (8), LD 20.1% (3), PC 11.3% (3), UKIP 2.4%, BNP
1.6%, GRN 0.4%

Analysis of England, Wales and Scotland

The marking thing about this election, noted above, is the absence of a large, quasi-universal swing or trend from one side to another. There were some large swings in certain seats, but it's hard to discern a general common trait about those seats or regions, though I personally noticed that there were large swings in safe Labour seats, maybe the result of voters voting as a protest vote against the 'owners' of the place when it's safe to do so and is unlikely to cause a change of hands in the said seat.

The Tories gained 100 seats exactly (slightly less excluding by-election gains they held). Most of those seats tended to be marginal seats, where the race often depends on the national mood and turnout patterns within the seat, or more middle-class areas gained by Labour in its 1997 landslide and narrowly held onto by Labour in 2005. The Tories also gained twelve seats from the LibDems, most of which had been gained by the party in the Tory landslide defeat of 1997. One of those seats is Winchester, a famous seat where the LibDems won by two votes in the 1997 election and held it in a subsequent by-election as well as 2001 and 2005. The Tories lost 3 seats (excluding the Speaker's seat), all to the LibDems: Solihull (technically a hold, but a notional gain), Eastbourne and Wells. In Norwich North, traditionally a Labour area, the young Tory MP held on by a comfortable margin of around 10% after a 2009 by-election gain. In Crewe and Nantwich, another Tory gain from Labour in a 2008 by-election, the Tories won by a large margin, 46-34 over Labour. Birmingham Edgbaston had been a seat everybody had been talking about as a must-win Tory gain if they wanted to win nationally. Labour held on to it 41-38, though Labour lost seats which were notionally safer than Brum Edgbaston. The Tories will also win in Thirsk and Malton on May 27, giving them 307 seats overall.

Labour lost 94 seats, all but a handful to the Tories. They did however win back three seats: in Chesterfield, they defeated the LibDems in Tony Benn's old seat, they gained back Bethnal Green & Bow from Galloway, and they picked up Blaenau Gwent in the South Wales coalfields from Dai Davies, an Independent who won a 2006 by-election to replace Peter Law, who had won as an Independent Labour candidate in 2005 in protest at Labour's all-women shortlist in the constituency. Davies has likely been hurt by some poor decisions of hers.

The LibDems had a poor night. The Cleggmania seen in polls absolutely didn't translate into increased support for the party, which has in fact suffered a net loss of 5 seats and a gain of only 1% in the popular vote. The reason hasn't been satisfactorily explained yet, but it's likely that voters were convinced at the last minute that the election was still a two-horse race, or Labour voters who had toyed around with Nick Clegg decided to vote Labour in fear of a Tory government. Increased media scrutiny of the LibDems and poorer debate performances in the last two debates certainly didn't help. However, the traditional problems of the LibDem strategy should also be noted: vote spread too thin around the country or poor strategic choices in terms of constituencies. The party suffered 13 loses overall, compensated by 8 gains. In Cornwall, where they held all 6 seats prior to the election, they lost three. It could partly be the result of an unpopular move to a unitary authority in 2009, a move backed by the local LibDems, but I think the LibDems suffered the consequences of that in the 2009 locals rather than in 2010. It should also be noted that the Tory majorities in Truro & Falmouth and Camborne & Redruth were extremely thin (less than 1%). LibDem hopes for gains in Oxford, a major student town, were dashed with a Labour hold in Oxford East and the defeat of the LibDem incumbent in Oxford West. Another student town where the LibDems had hopes was Durham, but Labour won 44-38 there. Perhaps the student vote didn't turn out as much as it should, or it could be related to the student registration problems in certain places. The LibDems gained 8 seats in all. In Norwich South, the seat with the lowest vote share for the winning party, the LibDems very narrowly defeated Labour MP and internal Brown enemy Charles Clarke, while in Burnley they finally gained the seat infamously known for its 2001 race riots after successes at the local level since the last election.

There were a number of rather shocking results. In Redcar, a very safe working-class Labour seat (held in 1983, so it's safe), the LibDems won a massive victory with a huge 21.8% swing to the LibDems. The closure of the Corus steel plant in Redcar likely explains the result, along with local government LibDem strength, but it remains the major English shocker of the night. In Montgomeryshire, held by the Liberals/LDs since 1983 (and excluding a one-term Tory between 79 and 83, since 1880) and by Lembit Öpik since 1997, the Tories won a shocking and unexpected victory on a 13% swing to them. Lembit Öpik's flamboyant and controversial style likely did him in. There were also large swings to the LibDems in Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney, a safe Labour seat in the South Wales coalfields, where the Labour share dwindled from 61% to 44% while the LibDems saw their vote increase by 17%. Labour held the seat, but it was surprisingly close for a safe Labour seat. The result in Pontypridd was also close, with a 13% swing to the LibDems. Demographic changes and younger professionals moving into this once-coalfield seat likely explains the result there. Also in Wales, Plaid failed to gain Ynys Môn (Anglesey), held by the party's leader in the Assembly, though it isn't all that shocking given that no incumbent has lost re-election on the island since the 1950s.

In England, Labour held on to Luton South, where its retiring MP was embroiled in the expenses scandal. The Independent in Luton South, Esther Rantzen, who stood on an anti-sleaze platform, did horribly with just 4% of the vote. Hazel Blears, another Labour MP embroiled in the expenses scandal, held on in Salford, winning 40% against 26% for the LibDems and 21% to the Tories. Jacqui Smith, the former Home Secretary and expenses scandal culprit, was defeated in Redditch by a decisive 44-30 margin by the Tory candidate. A number of cabinet ministers lost their seats, but no high-ranking cabinet ministers lost in the end. Ed Balls in Morley and Outwood came close to having a "Portillo moment", but held on 38-35 against the Tory's Antony Calvert.



% majority in each constituency

In Scotland, the trend there bucked the trend south of the border, with Labour actually increasing its vote share to 42% by 2.5%. Also amusing is the fact that no seats changed hands in Scotland. The SNP, which forms government in Holyrood, up for re-election in one year, will likely be quite disappointed. Salmond had a goal of 20 seats for the party, though most bookies thought 8 seats would be the SNP's seat count. It failed to win Ochil and Perthshire South, where Labour increased its majority and the SNP vote fell; and Labour's majority in Dundee West increased from approximately 5% in 2005 to 20% this year. Glasgow East, a safe Labour seat won by the SNP in a shocking 2008 by-election, wasn't even remotely close: Labour's defeated 2008 candidate won 62-25 against John Mason, the incumbent MP. Overall, the SNP increased its vote share only marginally to 19.9%, placing it second, but still far from its 29% level in the European elections in 2009 or the 33% in the Holyrood election in 2007. The LibDems had hoped to win Aberdeen South and two seats in Edinburgh (two seats which they only narrowly lost,

though), but its seat share remains stagnant and its vote fell nearly 4%. The LibDems also lost Dunfermline and West Fife, a 2006 by-election gain from Labour, to its original 2005 winner. Gordon Brown also saw his majority in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath increase, now a crushing 50% majority over the SNP. The Tories only marginally increased their vote share and they failed to win either Dumfries and Galloway from Labour, or two SNP seats which were on the party's target list. Even if Cameron forms a government, the Tories will have but one MP from Scotland.

The SNP's Welsh allies, Plaid Cymru, did poorly, with their vote down to only 11% in Wales. They won back Arfon, notionally held by Labour, but they fell short by a large margin in Ynys Môn and they fell far, far short of winning back Ceredigion, a narrow LibDem gain in 2005 where the LibDem majority increased substantially. The margin in Ceredigion is now 50-28.

The Greens broke through in Brighton Pavilion, winning their first seat ever (on less than 1% of the national vote) and marking one of the first seats won by Greens in a FPTP national election. MEP Caroline Lucas defeated Labour 31-29, while the Tories polled a rather poor 24% of the vote in a race rumoured to be a two-way Green-Tory contest. The Tories, however, did win Brighton Kemptown and Hove, both won by Labour in the past three elections. The Greens victory in Brighton Pavilion reflects a winning strategy for such parties, especially the Canadian Greens: focus almost all resources on one seat with a star candidate and bomb that seat with leaflets; while forgetting other seats. The Greens did that and it paid them dividends, though overall the party's share of the vote actually fell slightly and in most other constituencies it did as well. The Greens also did well in Norwich South, their 'second target', with 15% of the vote. It polled barely over 2% in both Oxford seats.

George Galloway, Respect's sole MP and a major victor of the 2005 election, moved from his constituency of Bethnal Green & Bow to Poplar and Limehouse, and he took a trashing there, winning only 18% of the vote against 40% for Labour and 27% for the Tories (who didn't win the seat after all). In Bethnal Green & Bow, Respect's candidate won 17% and third-place. Respect's best result was won by Salma Yaqoob in a massive

mud-sliding contest in the new seat of Birmingham Hall Green: Yaqoob won 25% and second place, narrowly ahead of the LibDems and not too far from Labour's 33% of the vote.

The BNP's leader Nick Griffin was standing in Barking against high-profile Labour MP Margaret Hodge, and the leader's result was quite bad for the party and reflects poorly on the party's overall results. Griffin won only 15% of the vote, the BNP vote actually down on 2005 and still in third place behind the Tories (18%) and far away from Labour, which won 54%, up 4% on 2005. Overall, however, the BNP's vote increased to 1.9%, likely its best result in a general election to date, and the BNP was the party, with the Tories, that saw its vote increase by the largest amount (+1.2%). This is likely due to running far more candidates than in 2005, though the BNP increased its Westminster presence in the North East. The BNP's result is not as bad as it's made out to be (nor is it all that good), but in Barking, it's very bad and at the local level, the BNP lost all 12 seats in the Barking and Dagenham borough council, where *all* seats are now held by Labour.

UKIP's former leader Nigel Farage, injured in a plane crash the day before the vote, was standing against the Speaker in Buckingham. John Bercow, the Speaker, is not entirely popular, especially in his own party, where his pragmatic and liberal stances are not all that welcome. Yet, Farage didn't make an impact and there was no late sympathy vote. Farage ended up in third, with only 17% and behind an anti-Bercow independent who polled 21%. Bercow's vote, however, was down roughly 11% on his 2005 result.

Elections in the UK are often fought on bases of classes, and those patterns have remained largely stable since 1935. On a map, the Tories win the most land area (as they did in 2005), because they represent largely sprawling rural or suburban areas. The party's strongest majorities are found, obviously, in the South-East and East, though in rural and very wealthy areas as a general rule. As previously mentioned, the Tories gained ground from Labour either in seats where the boundaries make them closely split between Labour and Tories, or in more well-off urban and suburban areas won by Labour in its 1997 landslide (eg, Lincoln and so forth). In other rural areas, old patterns based on historical religious adherence, die hard. Cornwall, parts of the South-West and Wales

have always been weaker Tory land because the Tories were historically seen, especially in Celtic Cornwall and Wales (Montgomeryshire, Brecon and Radnorshire), as the English Anglicans in opposition to non-conformist Celtic Cornwall. In Wales, the Tories have usually found strength in wealthy areas (Cardiff North, the Vale of Glamorgan) but also areas with a large number of English retirees (Pembrokeshire) and areas more English than Welsh (Monmouthshire). Scotland actually used to be a strong Tory area, but Thatcher's policies and the SNP killed it off. Thatcher was unpopular by the end in Scotland, and the SNP appealed to those voters who had voted for the Unionist Party of Scotland (merged into the national Tories in 1965) because of the Unionist's Scottish Protestant rhetoric. Labour has been reduced in this election to its base in working-class (usually old mining) areas. Almost all Labour seats are found in urban or densely-populated industrial valleys, giving the impression on a general map that they're a small party. Labour's best areas are in the Welsh valleys (the Rhondda etc), Liverpool and surrounding industrial hinterland, coal mining areas in the Yorkshire and Derbyshire, the mining stronghold of County Durham, Scottish mining areas in central Scotland and Fife, the Black Country around Birmingham, and the working-class areas in East London (or similarly working-class areas in western-ish London) and other cities including Glasgow. The Liberal Democrats have strongholds built largely on persons rather than demographics. While they do well in traditionally Liberal areas such as Cornwall, the Scottish Highlands or eastern rural Wales, personality encourages a lot of their vote. The LibDems, as mentioned in previous posts, often take different rhetoric to win different seats. It can sometimes even be borderline populist and nationalist, such as in Burnley, or Cornish nationalist as with Andrew George in St. Ives. As evidenced by the result in Ceredigion and especially Westmorland and Lonsdale, their MPs often have a large sophomore surge. That being said, there are some traditionally LibDem demographics: students (Durham, Oxford, Cambridge, Cardiff Central, Manchester Withington), young professionals and wealthy liberals (parts of south London), and some strength in certain resort towns (Torbay, Southport, Eastbourne). Sometimes, the LibDems win under slightly disconcerting circumstances (in some cases, gay opponents: Norfolk North and Simon Hughes' 1983 by-election win in Bermondsey). The LibDem's weird patterns of support, which are generally well spread out and peaking only in a handful of seats,

account for their weak results under FPTP. However, the LibDem strategy of working hard in certain seats to win them and hold them makes sure that on 23% of the vote, they manage 57 seats in 2010 rather than 23 on 25% in 1983, so it has its dividends as well.

A note on local elections: after 157 of 164 councils declared, the Tories hold 65 (-8), Labour has 37 (+15), the LibDems have 13 (-4) while 45 remain NOC (-3). The Tories lost 121 seats, now holding 3364 councillors against 2857 for Labour (+414) and 1615 for the LibDems (-141). A notable Labour gain is in Liverpool, where the LibDem majority has been defeated. In the London boroughs, Labour has picked up a good number, and Barking and Dagenham is an entirely Labour council. The BNP has only 19 councillors left, down 26. More results here.

David Cameron is favoured to form cabinet, and negotiations are underway as this is posted with Nick Clegg's LibDems. Labour had called by election night for a Lib-Lab pact, but Clegg had said during the campaign that the party with the most votes and seats should have first digs at forming a government. Hope for a Lib-Lab pact is extremely low, and Labour already rebuffed SNP offers at a grand Labour-LD-SNP-SDLP-Plaid coalition. Cameron yesterday highlighted the common ground between LibDems and Tories, but there remains significant differences, most notably on Europe, immigration and electoral reform. Electoral reform remains a top priority for the LibDems, but the Tories are the most reticent of the two major parties (Labour called by election night for some sort of talks on the matter) for electoral reform. The Tories might bury LibDem calls for electoral reform by accepting to long-winded committees on the matter or STV voting for the Lords or local elections. The LibDems ought to be cautious and intelligent when talking to the Tories. If there was to be a deal, an informal deal between both would be far better for the LibDems than a formal coalition, where the LibDems would obviously have to shed their 'alternative' image and would be associated by voters with Tory policies. It also remains to be seen if the LibDem electorate, a lot of which vote for the party because it's neither red nor blue, would be happy about a Lib-Tory deal. If talks fall through, Cameron could still form a minority cabinet relying on on-and-off support from Northern Ireland's unionists, the LibDems or even the SNP-Plaid for a majority on various matters. However, such a minority wouldn't be as stable as Harper's minority in

Canada, given that Labour is probably structurally and financially stronger than the Canadian Liberals and could afford to defeat Cameron in the House and force a snap election. It is quasi-certain anyways, however, that the current Parliament won't last as long as its predecessor and an election might be held as soon as winter.

Northern Ireland

Its best to analyse politics in Northern Ireland separately from the 'other island' because of the major differences. Northern Ireland has 18 constituencies (which also serve as multi-member STV constituencies for the Assembly elections). Politics remain sectarian in Northern Ireland despite the power-sharing in Belfast and the end of the Troubles, and political parties reflect those sectarian lines. However, the increase of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland will sooner or later trouble the delicate balance of power between the two major sectarian forces. Northern Ireland's 18 MPs are ignored in times of majorities, but in times of hung parliaments, the unionist MPs are courted actively. The Tories in the past sometimes depended on support from unionist MPs, and Sinn Féin's abstentionist MPs reduce the magic majority line from 326 to 323 in 2010. The unionist MPs might come in vital for a Tory minority government.

In Northern Ireland as a whole, Sinn Féin topped the poll with 25.5% of the vote, up 1% on 2005, while the DUP share of the vote fell 8.7% to 25%. The SDLP, the second nationalist party, saw its vote go down by only 1% to reach 16.5%, while the second unionist party, the UUP/UCUNF won only 15.2%, down 2.6% on 2005. The non-sectarian liberal Alliance won 6.3% (+2.4%) while the hardline anti-power sharing TUV won only 3.9%.

In Antrim North, Ian Paisley Jr. had no trouble in the race to succeed his father, winning 46.4% against 16.8% for Jim Allister, the TUV leader and former MEP. While Paisley Jr's result is down 10% on 2005, he maintains a comfortable 29.6% majority in the seat. Allister's result is rather bad and would only yield a handful of Assembly seats next year if the numbers hold up.

Reg Empey, the leader of the Ulster Unionists, was standing in Antrim South, the only seat where Empey's UUP-Tory coalition had a real chance of winning. Despite a 3.6% swing from the DUP to the UCUNF, Empey is 3.5% behind incumbent DUP MP William McCrea with 30.4% against 33.9% for the DUP incumbent. The TUV polled 5.4%. Empey's defeat will likely call into question his leadership, which is already rapidly evaporating, but also the continued existence of a clearly dwindling UUP, especially in face of the 2011 Assembly elections, where Martin McGuinness could become First Minister on the back of unionist divisions.

The shock came from Belfast East, the seat held by incumbent First Minister Peter Robinson, also leader of the DUP, since 1979. Robinson temporarily stepped down as First Minister earlier this year after it was revealed that his wife, Iris Robinson (formerly an MP as well) had sexual affairs and illegal financial dealings with a teenager. A poll had shown he wasn't at much risk in a Protestant DUP stronghold, but they failed to see the wave, which came not from the nationalists or UCUNF, but from the non-sectarian Alliance. Its candidate, Naomi Long, elected Lord Mayor of Belfast in 2009, won 37.2% of the vote against 32.8% for Robinson, on a massive 23% swing to the Alliance from the DUP. Robinson remains as First Minister, but his authority is severely shaken by this shocking defeat.

In Belfast South, the SDLP's Alasdair McDonnell had been elected in 2005 thanks to vote splitting between the unionists, but this time around he had no trouble winning. His share of the vote increased by nearly 11% to reach 41%, giving him a 17% majority over his closest rival, the Democratic Unionist Jimmy Spratt, who won 23.7%. Anna Lo, an Alliance Assembly member of Chinese descent, won a very pleasing 15% of the vote, which shows her popularity as an Assembly member (it isn't an ethnic vote, obviously, only 3% of the constituency's population is non-white) and the party's appeal in the seat. McDonnell's large victory reflects Sinn Féin's drop-out in his favour, but also the growing Catholic population in the seat.

Gerry Adams managed to increase his vote in Belfast West, Sinn Féin's heartland, to 71%. In Belfast North, despite a 7% increase in its vote share, Sinn Féin failed to wrestle

the seat from the DUP, which won 40%. However, Sinn Féin's 7% increase here is larger than the SDLP's 4.5% slide, reflecting the growing Catholic population in the seat and maybe a sign that Sinn Féin might be able to win it in the future.

Lady Sylvia Hermon, North Down's MP, was the UUP's sole survivor in 2005, but she left the party after it allied with the Tories and stood for re-election as an Independent against Ian Parsley, the Alliance-turned-Tory guy. Parsley obviously wasn't a top-caliber opponent to a very popular local MP. Hermon won 63%, up from 50% in 2005, against Parsley's 20.4%. The Alliance suffered from Hermon's popularity and their vote slid by 2% to only 5.6%.

Another setback for the Robinson clan was in Strangford, Iris Robinson's old seat, where she was retiring (obviously). The DUP's vote slid nearly 9 points to 45.9%, mainly to the benefit of the UCUNF, which won 27.8% (+6.4% on 2005). The DUP held on narrowly in Upper Bann, with 33.8% against 25.7% for the UCUNF and 24.7% for Sinn Féin, which placed a disappointing third after a poll had showed them in a strong second to the DUP.

The DUP held on in East Londonderry with a 15% majority on Sinn Féin while high-profile DUPer Sammy Wilson won re-election in East Antrim with a 22% majority on UCUNF.

Sinn Féin faced a very, very tough contest in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, a majority Catholic seat but one where a united unionist front can win. Rodney Connor, the unionist unity candidate, was the favourite against Sinn Féin incumbent Michelle Gildernew. Gildernew held on by four votes about a number of recounts against Rodney Connor. Both polled 45.5% of the votes. Because Gildernew was threatened, the SDLP's vote was massively squeezed, being halved to reach only 7.6%. If the SDLP had dropped out to save Gildernew, it would have been a much easier election for Gildernew.

Sinn Féin easily held on in Mid Ulster (Martin McGuinness' seat), Tyrone West and Newry & Armagh. The SDLP's former leader, Mark Durkan, was re-elected in Foyle with a 12.7% majority over Sinn Féin, though both parties vote slid, likely in favour of

Eamonn McCann of the far-left People before Profit, which won a record 7.7% in the seat. The SDLP's new leader, Margaret Ritchie, held on in South Down, with a comfortable 19.8% majority over Sinn Féin, despite the retirement of popular SDLP MP Eddie McGrady.

The DUP will send 8 MPs against 5 Shinnars, 3 SDLPers, one Alliance and one independent – for the first time since its creation, Northern Ireland will not be represented in Westminster by a unionist majority (10 unionists in 2005, now down to 9 against 8 nationalists and one non-sectarian).

The United Kingdom votes in its long-anticipated general election on Thursday, May 6th. For an election which was awaited by so many electoral pundits, it has not let them down one inch. The inclusion of three TV debates between the three major leaders – a novelty in British elections – has changed the general outlook of the election vastly. Whatever the results may be, it will likely go down as an historic election of sorts.

The Liberal Democrats' historic surge since the first debate, up to 33% in some polls and rarely falling below 28% or so since then, is obviously the most striking aspect. Because of the appeal of their new, young, charismatic leader, Nick Clegg; but also because of a general antipathy towards Conservatives and Labour. The LibDems have an unusual electoral coalition, including various groups of voters which on the outside are worlds apart on policies in a number of cases. They don't have any old lasting strongholds (except Orkney and the Shetlands!), like Labour has in the coal fields or the Tories in rural England, meaning that their electoral successes often come from a localized message against their party of choice or policy of choice. If not, it comes from a personal vote.

The result is that it renders even more useless the holy universal national swing (UNS) calculators. Those little gadgets work on the flawed assumption that the national swing from one party to another will be the same in all constituencies, in all regions. The UNS is a good thing to sell papers and grab headlines, but it isn't the most useful of electoral outcome predictors. The LibDem surge renders it all the more useless.

The current lines in polling seems to have the Tories at around 33-36%, Labour and LibDems usually at 28% each, giving or taking a few points. The polls have been remarkably stable in that range, though YouGov's daily tracker today had the LibDems down to 24% – something not yet backed up by any other pollster. In terms of seats, the UNS and other predictors seem to indicate that the Tories would be the largest party in a hung parliament with somewhere in the high 200s-low 300s in terms of seats, with Labour likely in second with somewhere between 210 and 250ish seats. The LibDems would likely be between the high 70s and mid 90s. A poll in marginal constituencies indicates a Tory majority of two, but if there's one thing I am allergic too, it is those polls in 'marginals' or in specific constituencies.

This would result in a hung parliament, which would mean that no party would have an outright majority. There are a lot of possible consequences of this, including a minority government similar to Canada, a Tory deal with the Northern Irish unionists (or SNP, but only if the Tories are very close to an overall majority) or a coalition deal between one of the parties and the LibDems. The LibDems will probably be in a good position to ask for a number of concessions on stuff such as electoral reform or working with Labour on condition that Brown goes, so I would personally argue that there's a better chance for a Tory minority government than the Tories agreeing to LibDem electoral reform and forming a coalition with them. However, there is an outside chance that Labour could push Brown out and agree to work with the LibDems, but it would require the Tories to be far away from the majority threshold, and at least the tolerance of other parties such as Plaid or the SNP.

There have been differing analyses of where the new LibDem vote comes from exactly, but given the topic, it's better to wait until the 7th to see the results. The LibDems would be leading, according to YouGov's last regional breakdown, in the South-West, which would indicate their resistance in all 6 Cornish seats but also pushing through in Devon and around Bristol where they're already naturally strong on balance. In London, they could win marginal Labour seats in Islington and that general area of northern London. In Birmingham, the bookies seem to be betting on the LibDems picking up the new inner city seat of Birmingham Hall Green. In Liverpool, the constituency of Liverpool

Wavertree, a rather well-off seat in the middle of deprived Liverpool could be won by the LibDems, who could also pick up Burnley, famous for its race riots in 2001 and for being the original base of the BNP. In the mining Labour heartland of the North-East, the LibDems could pick up seats in Newcastle and Durham (City), bourgeois enclaves in proletarian land.

The minor parties, namely the Greenies, UKIP and BNP will each have their eyes set on one seat each. The Greenies hope to pick up Brighton Pavilion, a Labour-held seat where the incumbent is retiring and where the Greens are running their leader and incumbent MEP Caroline Lucas. The LibDems seem to have informally 'dropped out', leaving the seat wide open for Lucas, who is the favourite in this very hip and young seat in the coastal resort of Brighton. Former UKIP leader and incumbent MEP Nigel Farage is taking on the Speaker, John Bercow, in his Buckingham seat. As per usual, neither Labour nor the LibDems are opposing the Speaker, who is a former Conservative. Farage is unlikely to win. The BNP will watch the east London seat of Barking, where its leader Nick Griffin (also an MEP...) is facing the Labour incumbent. Barking is a white working-class Labour stronghold, but the BNP's rhetoric plays well in this area close to major immigrant areas in Tower Hamlets. Griffin is unlikely to win, but the BNP wishes to do well enough to increase its representation on the borough council (all London boroughs are also up on May 6, with a number of other seats in English local government). The controversial George Galloway won a shocking and controversial victory in Bethnal Green & Bow in 2005, in a race dominated by the Iraq War in the Bangladeshi heart of London. Respect, Galloway's party, has since gone down the route of civil war and divisions, and got creamed in recent electoral outings. Galloway is now running in the new seat of Poplar & Limehouse, next door to Bethnal Green & Bow, probably to lose as a candidate rather than as an incumbent. Some say Galloway's standing might split the left vote and allow the Tories to pick up Poplar & Limehouse (which includes the gentrified Docklands, where I assume there's a base of Tory support). Respect is also going to watch Birmingham Hall Green, where Salma Yaqoob is running and already won the support of some Labour members.

Ed Balls is the only important cabinet minister facing a tough fight in the new seat of Morley & Outwood, and given that he is a likely leadership contender if/once Brown leaves the leadership, his victory or defeat will be a major point. Jacqui Smith and Tony McNulty, two of the largest names involved in the 2009 expenses scandal will likely go down to a hard defeat.

The race is also being played in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where issues are sometimes different.

The Conservatives are looking to make major gains in Wales, where they currently hold (notionally) three seats against 30 for Labour, 4 for the LibDems, 2 for Plaid and one seat held by an Independent. The Conservatives did top the poll here in the European elections, which marked the first time since 1918 or so that Labour didn't top the poll in its Welsh heartland. From their three seats today, the Tories would like to gain at least five seats to have a Welsh caucus of eight seats. The LibDem surge seems to have affected Wales as well, though seemingly to a lesser extent, which means that the LibDem's on-the-wire victory over Plaid in Ceredigion in 2005 will likely be secured and the LibDems may target seats such as Swansea West. Plaid is seemingly polling quite poorly, but Labour's decline might help it gain Ynys Mon and win outright in Arfon (held by Plaid, but Labour on notionals). A Plaid gain in Ceredigion, however, seems more and more unlikely.

The SNP is putting a lot of stock into this election in Scotland, where the Scottish Parliament, led by the SNP, is up in May 2011. However, Scottish voters seem to prefer Labour at Westminster and the SNP in Holyrood. However, the SNP did rather poorly in 2005, polling roughly 18% to the LibDems' 22%. Their vote will undoubtedly go up, and they could gain around two seats from the six they currently hold. The LibDems in 2005 had managed to coalesce a part of the Scottish anti-Labour vote, which usually floats between them and the SNP, so them improving on their 2005 result even minimally would be excellent and allow them to gain ground in Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

In Northern Ireland, much has been made of the electoral pact between the Conservatives and the Ulster Unionists, forming the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists-New Force (UCUNF). But the pact was not approved by the UUP's sole MP, Lady Sylvia Hermon in North Down, who left the party and is standing for re-election as an independent and is very likely to win. Lady Sylvia has been close to the Labour Party in the past, and she said that she was not a Tory. The UCUNF's only major hope is in Antrim South, where its leader Reg Empey faces incumbent DUP MP William McCrea. The bookies seem to be betting on Empey for a narrow win, but a poll by the *Belfast Telegraph* says otherwise. Empey's defeat would call into question his leadership and maybe the party as a whole (if he loses, 2010 could be the first election since... the 1800s that the Ulster Unionists do not win a single seat), especially in regards to the 2011 Assembly elections and the prospect of the Shinner Martin McGuinness become First Minister on the back of Unionist division. In Antrim North, the old patriarch of the DUP, Reverend Ian Paisley is stepping aside in favour of his son, Ian Paisley Jr., who is facing his father's former hardline ally, Jim Allister and his new anti-power sharing Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) in his first electoral outing. The goal for Allister is not to win, but to make a strong showing as to better position the TUV to win seats in the Assembly next year. The *Telegraph* says that TUV would win up to 5 seats on its current numbers. The other race to watch is in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, a majority Catholic constituency held by Sinn Féin's Michelle Gildernew (and held by hunger striker Bobby Sands for a very short while in 1981) but one where a unionist unity candidate could conceivably win. The unionist parties (DUP and UCUNF) agreed on the candidacy of Rodney Connor, who must be the narrow favourite in the seat, which is, ironically, the birthplace of the late 20th century Sinn Féin party. However, a poll by the *Telegraph* has Gildernew leading him by just one point – 44 to 43. The SDLP did not drop out here, but Sinn Féin did in South Belfast, where the SDLP's 2005 gain was on the back of unionist divisions. With Sinn Féin out there, and the Catholic population increasing, the SDLP will hold on rather easily.

There's a mock election poll running on this very blog – down the right-hand side. After 34 votes, the Tories are ahead on here with 32% against 26% for the LibDems. The

Greens are third with 12%, while there's a massive tie for fourth with Labour, UKIP, BNP and SNP each at 6%. Mebyon Kernow and Plaid have 3% each. This would give a Tory majority of 94, with 148 LibDems, 89 Labour and 40 others...