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Executive Summary

The Independent Commission on Voting Systems, under Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, set up by the government to look into a possible change in the voting system for Westminster, will recommend one system of voting to be put to voters in a referendum against the current plurality, or ‘first past the post’, system. The Jenkins Commission must make a choice based on the following formal criteria:

- A requirement for ‘broad proportionality’
- The need for stable government
- An extension of voter choice
- The maintenance of the link between MPs and geographical constituencies.

In the Democratic Audit report, Making Votes Count, we examined what would have happened at the 1997 and the 1992 general elections if the five main alternative voting systems had been used for electing MPs instead of the current system. We reviewed the Alternative Vote (AV) and the Supplementary Vote (SV); the Single Transferable Vote (STV); the Party List system; and the ‘elastic’ form of the Additional Member System (AMS). This report describes the main features of these systems in detail in the introduction.

An important limitation of this report has been revealed since the Jenkins Commission began its work. Four of the five systems reviewed there are essentially single systems with their own individual names and rationalizations. The exception is the Additional Member System (AMS), a ‘mixed system’ which combines plurality rule elections in local constituencies with a top-up mechanism of party list competition at regional level to achieve proportionality results. In its ‘elastic’ form, used in Germany and New Zealand, half the seats are allocated to local constituency MPs and half to ‘additional’ MPs at regional level. We found that the elastic version of this mixed system would have produced stable proportional results in 1992 and 1997.

It has since become apparent that other mixed voting systems might offer the Jenkins Commission a way of reconciling the aim of ‘broad proportionality’ with the widespread desire to retain as much context as possible between MPs and the electorate in local constituencies. By combining local constituency contests with regional top-up MPs, mixed systems can deliver both while expanding voter choice and meeting the need for stable government. Further a mixed system may assist the Commission to bridge the apparent gulf between the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats over the choice to be made.

Labour’s leaders and many MPs are still hanker after either the Supplementary or Alternative Vote systems, both of which retain the existing constituencies, but ensure that every MP elected has a majority in his or her constituency. The difficulty is that both SV and AV can, as they would have done in 1997, produce even more disproportional results than the current system (Making Votes Count, pp. 4-5). Either would facilitate tactical voting for Labour or the Liberal Democrats at the expense of the Tories: but both parties’ election manifestos in 1997 promised the electorate a choice between a ‘single proportional’ system and first past the post voting.
The Liberal Democrats, for their part, are formally committed to STV, though their party conference recently voted to accept a broadly proportional alternative. Labour is wholly opposed to STV under which people would vote not in single-member constituencies but in much larger multimember constituencies, partly because it rightly fears that it would favour the Liberal Democrats more than other proportional systems. Negotiations between the two parties and others have already led to compromise versions of AMS being adopted for elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Assembly. The Commission will also wish to make a choice which will command consensus support among electoral reformers who are divided over the various systems on offer. From their point of view, however, the Commission should choose a system which enhances the chances of the eventual referendum against the current system producing a majority for change. Thus, it will be important to maximise the political support for reform.

For all these reasons, much attention has focused on the idea of a mixed voting system for Westminster. This report looks in detail at two kinds of mixed systems. First, we calculate the electoral results for variants of the Alternative Member System, using plurality voting at the constituency stage, but varying the level of top-up representation from the chaotic 50 per cent to between 10-25 per cent. Secondly, we use the Supplementary of Alternative Vote at constituency level and again calculate the election results at varying levels of top-up (10 to 50 per cent). We examine how ballot papers would be structured and how voters respond to using them. Both approaches offer good prospects for acceptable compromise, though various issues arise.

The most significant question is whether the Commission can produce an electoral system which is broadly proportional, yet still allows a party which is genuinely popular, as Labour was in 1997, to win an outright majority in the House of Commons. The possibility of a single-party government is seen by some observers as desirable not simply in the interests of ‘stable’ government, but to avoid excessive coalitional power permanently attaching to the second party – that is, the Liberal Democrats. Occupying a pivotal position in a reformed House of Commons. A system which left open the possibility of single-party government, not reliant on the Liberal Democrats, could be the key to winning over the Labour leadership and enough of its MPs to campaign for change in the referendum. Here, the depth of the top-up layer of regional MPs is crucial: the thinner it is, the more likely it is to make single-party government possible, and the less likely it is to achieve broad proportionality.

As this report shows, versions of AMS with substantially majorities of MPs (two-thirds) elected in singlemember constituencies are highly proportional. Up to three quarters of MPs can be elected locally and AMS can still deliver broadly proportional results. Using a standard measure of deviation from proportionality (see Appendix 1), we found that AMS systems with two thirds or three quarters of locally elected MPs would have produced deviation (DV) scores of 5 and 7 per cent in 1997. These scores are within the 4 to 8 per cent range of disproportionality which is generally held to be acceptable for a working PR system. (By contrast, the deviation score in the actual 1997 election under the existing voting system was very high, at 23 per cent.) AMS elected in which five out of six MPs are elected locally might just possibly be construed as ‘broadly proportional’, but not when nine out of ten MPs are elected from constituencies, the DV scores for 1997 are 11 and 14 per cent respectively. (For the full range of mixes and outcomes, see Table 14, p. 19.) AMS schemes which involve re-drawing constituency boundaries could not be implemented in time for the next general election. AMS ballot papers were well liked by respondents to our large post-election survey, carried out by ICM in 1997.

The use of the Supplementary of Alternative Vote to elect local constituency MPs in a mixed voting system could potentially create two new electoral systems, currently known as ‘SV Plus’ and ‘AV Plus’ respectively. Their great advantage over AMS is that they would ensure that all locally elected MPs had majority support in their constituencies, and they would expand voter choice where no one candidate has a majority of first preferences. Supporters of smaller or less efficacious parties would be able to register their first preferences honestly, and use their second or subsequent preferences to help decide constituency outcomes. Both SV Plus and AV Plus ballot papers were well liked by respondents to our most recent national survey carried out by ICM in February 1998.

Variants of SV Plus and AV Plus with up to two thirds of MPs elected in local constituencies are proportional, producing DV scores within the 4 to 8 per cent range. Elections in 1997 under either system with three quarters of MPs elected locally would have fallen only just outside this range (the DV score is 8.7 per cent). But neither SV Plus nor AV Plus are proportional if higher shares of MPs are elected locally. Under ‘landslide election’ conditions, as in 1997, SV Plus and AV Plus give the leading party too great a dominance in local constituencies. If top-up MPs are fewer than a quarter of all MPs, there simply aren’t enough of them to soften the leading party’s over-representation at constituency level. In 1997, for example, the DV scores would have been 13 per cent if the mix were five local MPs to each top-up MP; and 17 per cent if the ratio were nine local to one top-up MP (see Table 14).

Our calculations suggest, however, that a Labour quest for the holy grail of a broadly proportional voting system which yet enables the party to form a government on its own in its strong election years, such as 1945, 1966 or 1997 could narrowly succeed. If we take mixes of local and top-up MPs which fall within, or near, the 4 to 8 per cent band of acceptable deviation scores, then three configurations would qualify: 75:25 AMS system would have given Labour a single-vote majority in 1997 and been proportional. An AMS mix of five local MPs to every top-up MP would have delivered an overall majority of 49, but with a DV score of 8.7 per cent. Thinner layers of top-up MPs under any of the three systems would have given Labour a majority, but would have failed the proportionality test.

Thus, the ‘window of opportunity’ is very narrow. Labour exponents of mixed systems however believe that the effects of dynamic campaigning could expand the party’s chances of securing single-party governments when the party is on a roll electorally. Labour could certainly do much better in winning an overall majority under a mixed electoral system if it could repeat its 1945 or 1966 results, when the party assembled nearly majority support in Britain, or if it could translate into general election votes its opinion poll performance in government during 1997-8. In all other elections, where the Tory and Labour vote shares are closer together, the underlying pattern of party support in Britain since the 1970s suggests that coalition governments or minority governments are most likely to be formed.
1. Introduction: Mixed voting systems

The creation of the Independent Commission on the Voting System in December 1997, under the chairmanship of Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, marks an important stage in the development of public debate about electoral reform in Britain. The Commission’s mandate states that it: "...shall be free to consider and recommend any appropriate system or combination of systems in recommending an alternative to the present system for Parliamentary elections to be put before the people in the Government’s referendum.

The Commission shall observe the requirements for broad proportionality, the need for stable government, an extension of voter choice and the maintenance of a link between MPs and geographical constituencies”. In our previous Democratic Audit report, Making Votes Count, we examined what would have happened at the 1997 and the 1992 general elections if five alternative voting systems had been used for electing MPs, given the patterns of voting at the 1992 and 1997 general elections in Britain. The systems we reviewed included:

- The Alternative Vote (AV) and the Supplementary Vote (SV), which keep the existing pattern of local constituencies intact but substitute a majority rule method for electing MPs. Instead of the current plurality rule (‘first-past-the-post’) method, voters either rank candidates in order (1,2,3 etc) under AV, or mark two As to show their top two party choices under SV.

- The Single Transferable Vote (STV) which groups seats into larger multi-member constituencies approximately five times bigger than at present, and then allocates seats between parties and candidates in proportion to votes, using a relatively complex system of counting votes. Voters express multiple choices across candidates.

- The Party List system in which similar multi-member constituencies are created, and seats are allocated between parties in proportion to their votes, using a simpler counting system. Voters mark only a top choice of party on their ballots, and the winning candidates for each party are selected in order from its list.

- The classic form of Additional Member System (AMS) in which half of MPs are elected in local constituencies double the normal size, using plurality rule (‘first-past-the-post’). The other half of MPs are elected in large regional constituencies so as to ‘top up’ parties’ seats and bring their overall share of seats into line with their share of votes in each region.

We were able to simulate in great detail how each of these five systems would have operated in the two 1990s general elections, using very large-scale surveys carried out immediately after polling day by JCM Research. Total respondents were 9,600 people in 1992 (when the survey was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust) and just over 8,400 people in 1997 (when the survey was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust). Both of these samples were structured so as to give an accurate representation of opinion in the component regions of mainland Britain. (Appendix 1 lists the regions used in the two years. Other technical information is given in our two previous reports, Replaying the 1992 General Election and Making Votes Count). Both questionnaires asked respondents to ‘vote again’ on a number of alternative ballot papers given to them. We could thus accurately reconstruct the second, third and subsequent preferences of voters for different parties in each region for those systems which involve counting multiple preferences (AV, SV and STV). We were also able to examine how alignments varied at the two stages of AMS voting (for local MPs and for top-up MPs). We could then simulate detailed results for each system by feeding in these regional-level figures to the first preference votes shown in local constituency election results, and constructing detailed new constituency patterns for AMS, STV and List PR. By re-running dozens of contests in new constituency boundaries and incorporating multiple preferences we were able to produce radically improved estimates of how the various systems would allocate seats between parties.

We are confident that those procedures give the most accurate attainable picture of how alternative voting systems would operate under British conditions. Indeed, they significantly push forward the repertoire of methods in political science for studying possible changes of electoral systems. Subsequently we have employed the same data and simulation procedures in a detailed LSE Public Policy Group report to the Government Office for London on possible systems for electing the Mayor and Assembly in the new Greater London Authority. The white paper on the governance of London sets out ministers’ proposals for introducing an SV voting system for the Mayor and a London-wide form of AMS for electing the Assembly, in line with the recommendations in the report.

However, there is one important limitation on the work included in Making Votes Count. Four of the five systems reviewed there are essentially single systems with their own individual names and rationales. The exception is the Additional Member System (AMS), which is a mixed system, combining plurality rule elections in local constituencies linked via a top-up mechanism to a party list competition at regional level. But AMS has been such a long-standing focus of discussion in the debates about electoral reform that it has come to be seen as a system in its own right, especially in the ‘classic’ form used in Germany and New Zealand, where half of the seats are allocated to local constituencies and half to the ‘additional’ MPs at regional level. With this exception, Making Votes Count said very little about the possibility of combining the major systems. Yet the Jenkins Commission might well consider that in Britain such a combination solution offers the best route forward to satisfying the four conditions in its terms of reference - maintaining constituency links, achieving broad proportionality, expanding voter choice, and meeting the need for stable government.

The Commission has to come up with a single alternative system which will command consent support amongst electoral reformers as a viable alternative to the current plurality rule elections. From electoral reformers’ point of view, their choice should also be one which enhances the chances of an eventual voting systems referendum producing a majority for change, so it will be important to maximise the political support for reform. In particular, an essential requirement for
the Commission will be to bridge the apparent gulf between the Labour party, where AV or STV seems to be the most preferred systems of the leadership and many MPs and the Liberal Democrats, whose formal commitment is still to STV. Negotiations between the two parties and others have already lead to compromise variants of AMS being adopted as the voting systems for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Assembly. So a lot of attention has focused on similar systems for Westminster since the Jenkins Commission began its work, and it is here that we focus our study.

The main types of mixed system

All the existing mixed electoral systems in Britain, and the main mixed proposals for Westminster elections, are fundamentally variants of AMS. They therefore include combinations of local and top-up MPs. Two features distinguish them from each other:

- Whether local MPs are elected using plurality rule (first-past-the-post), or alternatively whether a majority/minority system is used. With plurality rule a winning candidate must simply get more votes than any other candidate. Under majority rule, a winning candidate must get over half of all valid votes (that is, at least 50 per cent of eligible votes, plus 1).

- What proportions of locally elected and top-up MPs are chosen, ranging from exactly half and half, through systems with a majority of local MPs to systems with a strong preponderance of local MPs.

The choice between a plurality or a majority system for choosing local MPs affects the level of legitimacy which representatives enjoy and the strength of their relationship with their constituency. In 1997 only just over half (53 per cent) of elected MPs could claim majority backing amongst their constituents. This is because at least three main parties contested every constituency in mainland Britain, as they have done since 1974, and four parties in Scotland and Wales. Under AMS or mixed systems the areas that local MPs represent would get larger. But whatever the scheme used, there is no reason to doubt that on 1997 patterns of voting around half of all local MPs would still command only plurality and not majority support in their area.

The second choice about the proportions of local and top-up MPs reflects contradictory pressures. The more representatives who are elected locally, the smaller local constituencies can remain. With a 50:50 split of local and top-up MPs, constituencies would double in size. But with a 75:25 split of local and top-up MPs, constituencies would be only one third larger. The closer constituencies stay to their current size, the more likely it will be that local MPs can retain their existing ties to their constituency, which many observers see as a strong point of first-past-the-post elections. On the other hand, the greater the proportion of local MPs, the more difficult it will be to achieve a proportional matching of parties’ seat shares to their vote shares. With a preponderance of local MPs, in circumstances where one party is decisively ahead of two or more opposition parties and wins a “landslide” victory in local seats, there simply may not be enough top-up seats available fully to compensate the opposition parties which are underrepresented in terms of MPs in the Commons compared with the share of the vote. In general we can expect that the fewer top-up seats there are the more serious and frequent this problem will be.

Table 1 shows how two dimensions combine to give different types of mixed system. If plurality rule is retained for choosing local MPs then the mixed system remains an AMS variant, even if the proportion of local seats is boosted relative to the share of top-up seats. The already existing variants of AMS adopted in Britain all feature more than half of elected representatives holding local seats, although the share involved varies from 57 per cent (in the Scottish Parliament and London Assembly) to 66 per cent (in the Welsh Assembly). There are also seriously considered proposals for choosing the Westminster Parliament using AMS but with a preponderance of locally elected MPs. In the mid 1970s a Hansard Society report recommended adopting a 75/25 split of local and top-up MPs. And the Labour MP Jeff Rooker (now a minister of state) has proposed AMS with 500 locally elected MPs and 150 top-up MPs (a ratio of 77 per cent local MPs).

The other possibility is to change the way that local MPs are elected by requiring them to obtain majority support in their constituency, using either the Alternative Vote or the Supplementary Vote at this stage. The logic of these proposals is that local MPs would have enhanced legitimacy if they could all claim the majority support of their constituents. In the Supplementary Vote (SV) voters mark an X in a first preference column, and another X in a second preference column. First preferences are counted, and if one candidate has majority support they are elected straightaway. If no one has majority support, then under SV only the two candidates stay in the race. The third, fourth and subsequent candidates are eliminated in one go, and their voters’ second preferences are examined. Any second preferences for the two candidates still in the race are added to their first preference piles, and whoever now has most votes wins. SV expands voters’ choice because supporters of third or fourth placed parties in a local area can none the less influence the outcome, by casting a second vote for whichever of the viable local contenders they prefer.

If AV was used for the constituency vote, then voters could indicate a preference for as many candidates as they choose by numbering them 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. Again a candidate with majority support is elected immediately. But if no one has majority support on first preferences, the AV system moves on to eliminating candidates one at a time from the bottom and reallocating their voters’ second or subsequent preferences. This process continues until eventually either one of the remaining candidates has a majority of valid votes or there are only two candidates left, when the leading one wins.

These mixed systems have become known in Britain as ‘SV Plus’ or ‘AV Plus’, depending on which system for getting to a majority is used in the local constituency contests. The ‘Plus’ element denotes the presence of top-up MPs as well as local MPs. In principle the two systems can be used with any proportion of top-up MPs between 25 per cent and (say) 50 per cent. But characteristics AV Plus and SV Plus have been recommended as a way of maximizing the number of locally elected MPs, and strengthening their ties to their local electorates. Hence these schemes normally try to keep constituency areas as small as feasible, keeping the numbers of top-up MPs to the minimum needed to achieve a basically proportional outcome.

Once the main outlines of a mixed system have been
settled, some smaller choices can affect how it operates. One issue concerns the areas to be used for deciding upon parties' entitlements to top-up MPs. Pure proportionality can be attained most simply if all top-up MPs are allocated at a national level — so long as there are sufficient top-up MPs available to rectify any over-representation of the leading party in local seats (or any other bias at this stage).

However, a national top-up mechanism could mean that top-up MPs might have to concern themselves with the affairs of the whole country, fielding letters from "constituents" anywhere, for example. There could also be difficulties in securing the accurate representation of the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and the many Northern Ireland parties in opting for a national allocation of top-up MPs – so all mixed systems have envisaged that top-up MPs would instead be allocated within regional areas.

Large regional areas – such as the areas based on government offices for the regions being used for the 1999 European elections — might make it slightly easier in some circumstances to achieve proportional outcomes because they typically include different types of area (such as Labour-leaning cities and Tory-voting shire areas) where the characteristic biases in local seats outcomes may well offset each other somewhat. But this effect might be small, because the topping-up element in AMS will be more powerful, except where the proportion of such MPs is very small. Top-up MPs could confront substantially more problems in relating to their constituents in such large regions, and coping with the diversity of geographical areas and social problems included in each area. Smaller sub-regions (such as the 18 regions schema we use below) would make it easier for top-up MPs to relate to their voters, because their areas would be smaller and somewhat more socially homogeneous. Choosing the best size of regions to use for allocating top-up MPs depends on the empirical importance of these countervailing effects.

A final factor to consider is whether there should be any form of "threshold" for awarding top-up seats — that is, a special requirement which is not simply based on each party's vote share, but is a precondition that must be met before it can win any seats at all. Deciding whether to have a threshold and of what kind is a difficult choice related to the size of regions and the share of all MPs elected at the top-up stage. With no other restrictions in place, the minimum share of votes that a party will need in region A will be 100 per cent divided by the number of top-up seats in A. For example, with 10 top-up seats then (ceteris paribus) a party with 10 per cent of the Votes in area A will always secure one MP. But usually the other parties' votes will not divide in simple multiples of this percentage, so that in practical terms a party with 8 or 9 per cent support will always always secure a seat. (The exact level where this occurs depends on the voting rule being used, and the fragmentation of votes for other parties.) With 20 top-up seats in a region a party with 5 per cent will almost always get an MP, and one with 3–4 per cent will often secure representation in practice.

The additional threshold requirements which might be imposed could specify a minimum share of the regional vote that parties must attain before they can win any top-up seats, say 5 per cent, which would stop any drift to representation of 3 or 4 per cent parties. Such a limit would provide a disincentive for existing larger parties to fragment or for splinter groups to set up on their own. No national vote threshold (of the kind used in Germany) can be specified in Britain, because of the very small percentage of the total UK vote won by Plaid Cymru and the main Northern Ireland parties. An often-suggested restriction would be to require a party to win at least one local seat somewhere within the UK before it can be awarded top-up seats in any region. The one local seat rule is likely to appeal to all the established parties, since it preserves them from new competitors and serves as a bulwark against splinter parties and extremist groups (such as racist parties) winning top-up seats. The rule is also fairly easy to operate and cope with the difficulty of representing parties found only in one region or nation of the UK. Hence in our analysis below we have assumed that this rule is the only threshold.

The electoral systems chosen for Scotland, Wales and London and the European Parliament have not had any formal threshold at all. Instead they rely on the fact that only parties with quite high percentages of votes (around 7 to 9 per cent in any electoral district) could hope to secure representation in these systems. But Westminster elections are different in one critical respect — there are far more MPs (659) than there are representatives in Scotland (129), Wales (60) or London (25). Even divided into regions and applied only to top-up seats, this greater assembly size alone makes some form of threshold likely. There are also other considerations (favouring a threshold — such as the greater importance often attached to securing relatively stable patterns of representation in the Westminster Parliament, which functions as the ultimate source of all constitutional authority within the UK.}

DEMOCRATIC AUDIT
2. Variants of the Additional Member System

Under AMS voters are given a voting paper split into two parts, shown in Figure 1. The top half is a familiar plurality rule ballot paper where citizens mark a single X vote for their preferred local candidate. Between 82 and 89 per cent of people choose the same party at constituency level as their general election vote – the main differences were that one in every 16 Tory and Labour voters now backed the Liberal Democrats, while one in eight Liberal Democrats switched to Labour. The bottom half of the voting form is effectively a list PR ballot, where people indicate a preference across parties at the regional level, again by casting a single X vote. Our 1997 survey asked people to: "Please vote for a party to shape the overall balance of seats in parliament. You may choose to support the same party or a different party". There was a considerable amount of 'ticket splitting' in regional votes. One in six Labour and Tory voters at the constituency level did not back the same party at regional level, and one in three people supporting the Liberal Democrats or the nationalist parties also changed their vote at regional level. The male losers from ticket splitting were the Liberal Democrats, who are still seen by the British public as a party which is good at representing local constituency interests but which has a less clear-cut identity in terms of national politics.

In our May 1997 survey, carried out by ICM, this form of ballot paper was well-liked by respondents. After they had "voted" on each ballot we asked: "How much would you like to vote this way in the future?" The AMS ballot performed better than its four rivals, with 54 per cent of people saying they would like to vote this way, 21 per cent saying they disliked it, and 25 per cent neutral or undecided. When respondents were filling in the ballots we also monitored how much difficulty they experienced by recording if they needed an additional explanation. Only one person in six needed an explanation with the AMS ballot, again the lowest level, and half the number of people needing extra help with the STV ballot.

Allocating seats under AMS

At the stage of counting votes the local constituency ballots are looked at first, and the seat winners determined. Whoever gets most votes in each area wins, irrespective of whether they obtain majority support or not. Next the party list votes are counted at regional level, and seats are allocated to parties using a top-up mechanism. The essential principle of AMS is that if a party's share of seats in the region following the local contests is below their share of the regional vote they are allocated extra seats, while if they are already adequately represented from local seats they get no top-up seats. Under classic AMS (with half of seats local and half top-up) there is no difficulty in ensuring that this topping-up process produces an accurate matching of vote shares and seat-shares. The system's proportionality is limited only by the total number of seats in the region (which affects how coarse-grained or fine-grained the fit between seats and votes is), and by the fraction of the vote cast for "other" parties (those whose low percentage of the vote means they fall below the effective threshold for winning seats).

The detailed seat allocation approach used in all three existing AMS systems in Britain takes the total regional vote for each party and then divides it by the number of seats that it has already won in local constituencies plus one. The first top-up seat goes to the party which has the most party votes per seat so far won. To allocate the second top-up seat we now add one to that party's total of seats, and add one for the formula and redistribute its vote to give its new uncompensated vote total. We compare the resulting figures with all the other parties' uncompensated votes. Whichever party has the largest figure now wins the second seat, and we change the divisor for that party in the same way. Then we compare the parties' new uncompensated votes to see who should win the third seat. This process continues until all the seats in a region have been allocated.

To see how things would work in practice, consider Table 2, which shows how the first few and the last few top seats would have been allocated in the North region at the 1997 general election using the division method. For this exercise we compute the party list votes by just adding up all the constituency votes from the actual general election results in the North. There are 36 seats in the region, hence under AMS there would be 18 local seats and 18 top-up seats on a classic AMS format. In 1997 Labour got 61 per cent of the votes, the Conservatives 22 per cent, the Liberal Democrats 13 per cent, and other parties just under 4 per cent. Labour would have won 17 of the AMS local seats, and the Tories the other one. To allocate top-up seats we start off in the top row recording the total votes for each party and then divide it in the second row by each party's local seats plus 1. With no local seats at all but 13 per cent of the regional vote, the Liberal Democrats clearly have the largest uncompensated vote. So they get the first seat. We now move to the second division row to allocate the second seat: the Liberal Democrat vote is divided by two (that is, 1 seat + 1), and now looking along the division row, it is apparent that the Conservatives have the most uncompensated votes and so they win the second top-up seat. In the third division row we now divide the Conservative party vote by 3 (1 local seat, and 1 top-up seat, +1) and then compare along the row, and it emerges that they still have the most votes per seat and they therefore take...
Table 2: How the classic AMS system would work in the North region using the 1997 general election outcome pattern of constituency votes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party vote</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Liberal Democrat</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Seats allocated to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Party vote</td>
<td>391,697</td>
<td>300,960</td>
<td>225,837</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lost seats</td>
<td>17 seats</td>
<td>6 seats</td>
<td>0 seats</td>
<td>0 seats</td>
<td>15 local seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st division</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td>Lib Dems win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd division</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td>Lib Dems win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd division</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td>Lib Dems win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th division</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td>Lib Dems win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th division</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>56.945</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td>Lib Dems win</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and so on until...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party vote</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Liberal Democrat</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Seats allocated to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party vote</td>
<td>23.117</td>
<td>40.109</td>
<td>35.973</td>
<td>60,329</td>
<td>Lib Dems win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lost seats</td>
<td>22 seats</td>
<td>7 seats</td>
<td>5 seats</td>
<td>5 seats</td>
<td>18 top-up seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL SEATS</td>
<td>23 seats</td>
<td>8 seats</td>
<td>5 seats</td>
<td>5 seats</td>
<td>35 total seats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: All the vote numbers in this example have been rounded up or down to the nearest 0.5, which makes the table easier to read.
In each of the division rows, the smallest number shows the winning party for that seat. We have assumed that the parties included in the ‘other’ category would not meet the threshold condition for winning any top-up seats.

The third seat as well. In the fourth division row, we divide the Tory vote by four (1 local seat, plus 2 top-up seats =4) and compare along the row. The Liberal Democrat uncompensated votes total is now the largest, so that they win the fourth seat. In the fifth division row we divide the Liberal Democrat vote by three (2 seats + 1): the Tories now have the most votes unrecognized, so that they gain a seat. And so the process goes on, with Labour entering into the top-up seat stakes at later stages and doing surprisingly well as the other parties’ uncompensated vote totals drop. For example, in the penultimate row, the seventeenth seat goes to the Liberal Democrats, while in the final row shown, Labour has the largest uncompensated vote and narrowly wins the 18th top-up seat from the Conservatives.

In the end, the Tories would win 7 of the North’s 18 top-up seats, Labour would win 6, and the Liberal Democrats 5. Adding these sub-totals to the local seats leaves Labour with 23 MPs (64 per cent of seats for 61 per cent of the vote), the Tories with 8 seats (22 per cent of the seats for 22 per cent of votes), and the Liberal Democrats with 5 seats (slightly more seats than their vote share of 13 per cent). In short all the main parties would be somewhat over-represented by classic AMS in the North, at the expense of the smaller ‘other’ parties. We have assumed that they cannot qualify for a top-up seat by virtue of a threshold requirement that parties must win at least one local seat to be eligible for the award of top-up seats.

The particular way of carrying out the division approach shown in Table 2 is known as the ‘de Hondt system’ after the person who invented it, a nineteenth century Belgian mathematician called Victor de Hondt. With small numbers of top-up seats the approach will typically tend to favour the largest party or parties (those with more than a third of the vote) compared with smaller parties. For instance, this effect causes real problems in the Welsh Assembly system, because Euro-constituencies are used as top up areas there, and they have only four additional members each. However, in general the regions to be used for Westminster elections will tend to have enough seats being allocated proportionally between parties to prevent the de Hondt rule (or any other rule for allocating top-up seats) from introducing serious distortions.

Measuring proportionality

At this point we make a small digression to explain precisely how we measure the concept of ‘proportionality’. The standard political science index works by adding up the differences between each party’s vote share and its seat share, for all parties. We ignore the plus or minus signs of these deviations, and instead simply add up the numbers involved and then divide the resulting total by two (to avoid double counting). This index is known as the deviation from proportionality, or DV score for short. Table 3 shows how the DV score is calculated for the 1997 general election. The index can be thought of as showing what proportion of MPs in Parliament occupy seats that are not justified in terms of their party’s share of the national vote. Similarly we can compute DV scores at the regional level. For instance, as a result of the AMS election in the North region set out in Table 2 the DV score would be 3.7, showing that using this voting system fewer than 4 per cent of MPs would be sitting for parties whose regional share of the vote would not justify them holding that seat.

Table 3: How to work out ‘deviation from proportionality’ in the 1997 general election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% votes</th>
<th>% seats</th>
<th>deviations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish National Party</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaid Cymru</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum Party</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In adding up the deviations here, we ignore the + or – signs. Deviation is calculated for each British only, since Northern Ireland is a separate party system.

To avoid misinterpreting the DV statistic it is very important to note that in a liberal democracy the index does not even theoretically have a maximum of 100 per cent. A 100 per cent DV score would mean that all the seats in parliament were allocated to one or more parties who got no votes at all, while no seats were allocated to any party that did win votes! A political system which achieved such a result could not conceivably be called a liberal democracy. So what then is a practical and relevant view of the maximum disproportionality possible in a liberal democracy? Our suggestion is to envisage a situation where the party with most votes automatically got all the seats in Parliament, whatever its vote share. A political system runs on these lines could just be viewed as democratic – after all, this exaggeration of the largest party’s vote share only accomplishes in a somewhat more extreme fashion the
normal effects of 'first past the post' elections. Now on our
criterion the maximum DV score attainable in a liberal
democracy would always be 100 per cent minus the largest
party's share of the vote. For example, in the 1997 general
election Labour got 44 per cent of the vote and so the
maximum DV would have been as low as 56 per cent. Set
the actual 1997 DV score of 21 per cent against this
maximum, and we can see that the system was not one fifth
of the way to being completely unrepresentative, as the raw
DV score might suggest. Instead it was two fifths of the way
to being as bad as it could possibly be, while Britain still
operated as any sort of liberal democracy.

In theory an electoral system could be perfectly
proportional and so the DV's minimum could be zero. But in
practice there is a lower limit to the DV score which is
above zero. It is influenced mainly by the share of total
votes which is dispersed amongst very small parties, or	hose which cannot meet the threshold requirement for
winning seats. There are also a number of other more
technical limitations of any seat allocation process - such
as the impossibility of allocating fractions of seats to parties.
This latter condition is not a major problem in the UK, since
the House of Commons is a very large assembly with 659
members. Each seat transfer between parties shifts only one
sixth of 1 per cent of seats, in principle making it easier to
fine-tune party seat shares to their vote shares.

The effect of these slightly complex considerations
about minimum and maximum DV scores means that
political scientists are forced to formulate only rules of
thumb: for judging electoral systems, taking into account
multiple factors. In general a working electoral system for a
large assembly such as the House of Commons can be
regarded as operating proportionally if it can reliably
achieve a DV score of between 4 and 8 per cent across all
elections and configurations of party support. We use this
range as a benchmark against which to measure the systems
reviewed below. With its strong votes advantage for the
leading party over rival major parties, and its large 'other'
vote for small parties, the landslide 1997 election provides a
good 'acid test' of the competing systems. The more 'normal'
1992 election shows how systems would perform under easier
conditions.

How the parties perform under AMS variants
To estimate how parties would perform under a classic AMS
system we paired existing Westminster constituencies
together in Making Votes Count. We then ran first-past-the-
post contests again using the 1997 votes in the paired
constituencies to see who would have won the AMS local
seats. The top-up members were allocated the remaining
seats in each of 18 regions we used in that study. With half
of the seats being used for the top-up mechanism we showed
that classic AMS would operate in a highly proportional
manner, matching party seat shares to their vote shares
almost exactly, except for the non-representation of small
'other' parties. The AMS system would have operated more
proportionally than any of the other alternative electoral
systems we examined.

However, in Making Votes Count we found it difficult
to estimate how elections would have turned out under other
variants of AMS. While the 50:50 version could be
modelled by pairing up constituencies, it was not possible
to examine other variants such as 75 per cent of seats in local
constituencies and 25 per cent top-ups, in detail, because we
could not partition the 1997 general election votes within
constituencies. It might be feasible to go to local
election results and try to estimate the effects of
partitioning constituencies from local election outcomes,
but the patterns of voting across the two tiers of government
are normally very different. Even in 1997, when the general
election and some local elections took place on the same
day, there was considerable evidence of 'ticket splitting'. In
some areas of the country up to 20 per cent of general
election voters appear to have chosen a different party in the
local elections. Hence in Making Votes Count we included
only some very general estimates of how other AMS variants
would work, based on interpolating results at a national
level.

We can now offer substantially improved estimates for the
AMS variants, however, by carrying out detailed
estimates of local and top-up seats at the regional level. We
know how the parties won seats in each region in the 100
per cent constituency contests at the general election. And
we showed in Making Votes Count how the parties would
have won local seats in each region (and hence also top-up
seats) in a 50:50 version of AMS. For our new estimates we
have assumed that with 67 per cent local seats, or 75 per
cent, or any other intermediate level between 50 and 100 per
cent, the outcome will lie on a straight line from the 50
percent result to the 100 per cent result. With this simplifying
assumption we can interpolate a local seats outcome for each
AMS variant at top-up seats in each region, and work out how they
should be awarded so as to make the parties' overall seat
shares most closely approximate their vote shares there.
These interpolations remain estimates, but they are much
more reliable and detailed than before. Our assumption of a
linear relationship in how local seats are won as the mix of
local and top-up seats moves from 50:50 to 100 per cent
local may not be accurate: we have no way of knowing at this
point. However, because of the presence of the top up
mechanism any small flows in our estimates of local seat
distributions will usually be compensated for at this stage.
Hence the overall regional and national seat numbers for the
parties calculated in this way are highly unlikely to change
significantly in practice, and may be treated with
considerable confidence.

Table 4 shows how the parties would have won seats
overall if six main variants of AMS had been used in the
1997 general election, running from the classic 50:50
combination up to a maximum of 90 per cent local seats, and
only 10 per cent top-up seats. The last column shows the DV
scores each variant would achieve. The table is based on
top-up seats being allocated in the same 18 regions. We also
fully cross-checked our analysis using the eleven larger
government regions which are being used for distributing
List PR seats in the 1999 European elections, and are based
on the same areas as the government offices for the regions.
We wanted to see if larger regions would improve the
proportionality of different systems. In fact we found
virtually no differences either in party seat totals or in
overall DV scores for each combination of local and top-up
seats between the two regions at regional level. Finally, we did
not implement a d'Hondt method fully for allocating seats,
parsimoniously. But our method of
equalising party deviations from proportional outcomes is likely
to be very similar to d'Hondt outcomes — and we would not
expect any significant differences in results.

There are a number of salient features in these results,
although radical, all the table given in our earlier work.
First, our baseline results for classic AMS have shifted very
slightly, and we have corrected a miscalculation in the
original table which put the DV score at 2 per cent (when in fact
it should have rounded up to 4 per cent). The changes at regional
level push the baseline DV score for AMS to 4.6 per cent.
Second, we now are confident that neither the overall DV
score nor parties' seat numbers will change at all if the
higher ratio of local to top-up seats (57:43) used in the
Scottish Parliament or London assembly versions of AMS
were employed for Westminster. Even more importantly,
Table 4: How parties would have won seats under different variants of the Additional Member System in 1997 and 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seats won by main parties:</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seats won by main parties:</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Top up seats are allocated in 38 regions in 1997, and in 33 regions in 1992. See Appendix 3 for details of the regions used.

moving to the Welsh assembly configuration (67 per cent local and 33 per cent top-up seats) would not increase the DV score, although it would shift seats slightly to Labour, mainly from the Liberal Democrats.

As the proportion of local seats increases to three quarters of all MPs, the disproportionality score would also grow, but by much less than we previously anticipated. A 75:25 mix of local and top-up MPs would still deliver a broadly proportional result, within the 4 to 6 per cent range we indicated above as the practical range for a proportional system at Westminster. The main beneficiary of this change would be Labour, taking seats from both the Liberal Democrats and the Tories — because Labour's hegemonic position in the 1997 election in local seats could not be fully offset by the topping-up process at the 75:25 ratio.

With an even larger preponderance of local MPs, the same effect pushes the DV score past the proportional range, but not by much. For example, with (five sixths (83 per cent) of MPs elected in local constituencies, the 1997 DV score is nearly 11 per cent — but this is still around half of the actual 1997 DV score, which was significantly better than the scores for some other systems widely regarded as proportional. For instance, in Making Votes Count we showed that in the difficult conditions of the 1997 general election STV would have had a DV score of 13.5, and one form of list PR would have reached 10 per cent. In 1992 the 83:17 scheme would have been on the top margin of our benchmark range. But with 90 per cent of MPs elected locally under AMS, the DV score would be approximately twice as high as with 75 per cent, and be above two thirds of the actual DV score under plurality rule. However, even here the small number of top-up MPs would have positive effects for both the Tories and the Liberal Democrats in a relatively balanced way, although the nationalist parties would remain disadvantaged.

A potentially important aspect of AMS is the parties' differential success in winning local seats, which may be important in terms of building up party 'strongholds' and party organization. MPs for local constituencies may be more politically secure and regarded as more legitimate by citizens than those who win top-up seats. Table 5 shows the parties' local and top up seats under two of the AMS schemes, the Scottish and London mix of 57:43 and the 75:25 mix. Labour's strong position in the 1997 election is demonstrated by its higher percentages of local seats than the scheme mix overall, while the Liberal Democrats are highly dependent on top-up seats. The Conservatives secure local seats in line with each scheme's percentage of local seats.

All the variants of AMS have important effects on the balance of the parties' representation across regions. In the least proportional (90:10) variant, for instance, the Conservatives would have won no local AMS seats in either Scotland or Wales (just as they won no seats there in the actual general election). But the Tories would still have won 5 top-up MPs in Scotland and 4 top-up MPs in Wales. Similarly under the 90:10 mix the Liberal Democrats would have won at least 4 MPs in every region of the country but Wales and the North, and even there they would gain a couple of MPs. Again the major parties would also maintain both local and top-up seats in virtually all regions, even under the 90:10 mix: the Tories would lack local seats only in Scotland and Wales, and the Liberal Democrats only in the East Midlands. In fact, with more proportional systems, where greater numbers of top-up MPs require bigger local seats, the Liberal Democrats would have experienced more problems in winning constituencies, notably in the two Midlands regions and the Eastern region. But the party would be more than compensated by increases in its overall representation in these areas.

Table 5: The number of local and top up seats won by the parties under two AMS schemes, on the 1997 voting patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>57:43 scheme</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Con</th>
<th>Lib Dem</th>
<th>SNP/PC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local seats</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top up seats</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total seats</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of seats local</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>75:25 scheme</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Con</th>
<th>Lib Dem</th>
<th>SNP/PC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local seats</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top up seats</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total seats</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of seats local</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DEMOCRATIC AUDIT
3. The new runners: SV Plus and AV Plus

Under these two systems the apparatus of local and top-up seats, and the methods to be used for allocating additional members to parties, stay exactly the same as they are with all variants of AMS. However, because a majority rule system is used to decide who shall win the local constituency seats, the ballot papers presented to voters are a bit more complicated than under AMS. Because our previous work had not explicitly examined this question, with the generous support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust we were able to commission ICM Research to conduct a full poll of a national sample of 1666 people across mainland Britain. Interviewing took place from 26 February to 3 March 1998. Since we were not using these results for simulation purposes, the sample was split into only five regions: Scotland, Wales, and the north, Midlands and south of England. For each system, ICM Research presented people with an SV Plus and an AV Plus ballot paper, and asked them to vote on it, just as they would do in a real election. We also tested in unchanged form an STV ballot paper which we used in 1997 and 1992 to get a benchmark comparison. In line with our previous studies the interviewers briefly explained how to fill in each form, and additional explanations were provided for those people who had any difficulties completing the ballot. We did not attempt to explain how votes would be counted, or what the characteristics of each system might be.

The SV Plus ballot paper was asked first and it is shown in Figure 2. The SV local seat stage was on one sheet and the top-up stage (identical to that used for AMS) was on a second sheet. Interviewers explained: ‘In this system, first vote for a candidate and a party to represent your local constituency, using this ballot paper. You have two votes. Please vote in this column for your most preferred party or candidate. [Respondent fills in first column on local sheet] And now please cast a second vote to be counted in case your first choice cannot win this constituency. [Respondent fills in second column on local sheet] [Interviewer turns over sheet] And now, on this second sheet, please vote for ONE party to shape the overall balance of party seats in parliament’. The AV Plus ballot paper was asked second and is shown in Figure 3. Again the local stage was on one sheet and the top-up stage on a second sheet. Interviewers introduced the local stage as follows: ‘In this system, again vote first for a candidate and party to represent you local constituency using this ballot paper. You can vote for as many or as few candidates as you like by numbering them 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. in order of your preferences’.

The wording for the top-up stage was identical to that used with SV Plus. As in our previous work, we used two indicators to gauge how respondents have reacted to different ballot papers. First, as well as the introductory explanation used with all respondents described above, the interviewers had an additional explanation for each stage of the ballot, to be
used if respondents had any difficulty following what they were being asked to do. The proportion of people who asked for an additional explanation was then monitored, and this provided a clue about how difficult respondents found each system. The SV Plus and AV Plus ballot papers are more complicated than either the single systems (such as AV or SV alone) or AMS. People not only have to vote in two stages, but also use an unfamiliar method in the first stage (SV or AV) rather than traditional first-past-the-post. Table 6 shows that the proportion of people asking for some extra clarification was three in every ten people. This level is significantly higher than what we found with either SV or AV on their own or with classic AMS in our May 1997 survey. The second top-up vote stage of SV Plus and AV Plus raised less difficulty, with a quarter of respondents asking for an additional explanation.

However, the implementation of the 1998 survey was different in some procedural way from that in 1997—notably in not starting with a set of simpler ballot papers. Distance from the general election may also be a factor. The proportion of people asking for an additional explanation of the STV ballot paper was 3% in 1997, but rose to 40% in the 1998 repeat of this ballot. Thus higher levels of additional explanations were used across the board in 1998, and not just with SV Plus or AV Plus. Perhaps in 1998, ten months after the general election, people needed more reminders about all voting systems than they had in the immediate aftermath of polling day in 1997. Another difference was that our introduction to the survey as a whole made clear that the government was intending to hold a referendum on different voting systems in the next few years. Hence people may have been more scrupulous in making sure they understood the ballot in 1998 than a year earlier.

Table 6: The percentage of respondents requiring an additional explanation of ballot papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998 survey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus first stage</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus second stage</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV Plus first stage</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV Plus second stage</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STV</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 survey</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STV</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8447</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second and more direct indication of respondents' reactions is given by a question asked at the bottom of each ballot paper: ‘How much would you like to vote this way in the future?’ Respondents were given a seven point scale to tick, running from ‘Like a lot’ through ‘Neutral’ to ‘Dislike a lot’. Table 7 shows that the SV Plus ballot paper attracted the fewest dislikes, eliciting stronger support in this survey than any of the 1997 ballots papers. AV Plus was somewhat less well-liked, but still showed a strong positive balance of opinion. These results show a stronger public endorsement of SV Plus and AV Plus tested in 1998 than for SV and AV alone tested immediately after the general election. Although the scores for STV also improved, it remained the least popular system, with more than double the ‘dislike’ responses of the other two, but the balance of opinion was now even. Hence Table 7 could suggest that people may feel more strongly attached to plurality rule election in the immediate context of a general election, so that when we surveyed them in 1997 and 1992 they were less prone to say they liked other voting systems than in 1998, with the general election now ten months in the past. Alternatively the public might be beginning to ‘warm up’ slightly to the prospect of alternative electoral systems in the context of an eventual referendum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N=1001</th>
<th>AMS</th>
<th>54</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STV</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Responses to the question: ‘How much would you like to vote this way in the future?’

How the parties would perform under SV Plus and AV

To assess how these systems would perform, we ran a set of simulations of SV and AV outcomes in the same double-sized Westminster constituencies used for the classic 50:50 version of AMS. Using the responses to our SV and AV ballot papers in our 1997 survey of 8,500 people in 18 regions of mainland Britain we were able to project how voters in the paired constituencies would have cast their second preference votes under SV, and their second and subsequent preferences under AV. In those AMS constituencies where one party would anyway win majority support the local seat outcomes were obviously the same as those under classic AMS using plurality rule. But in areas where no party gained majority support outright, the AV or SV systems swung into play, and provided different local seats results. We found only one double-sized constituency where the SV and AV outcomes differed from each other. Hence in the remainder of this discussion we concentrate on the SV Plus outcome. For all intents and purposes the AV Plus outcome was the same as with SV Plus.

Table 8 shows the local seats outcomes under SV Plus with a 50:50 mix of local and top up seats compared with the same outcomes under classic AMS. The results are broken down across the 18 regions used in our 1997 study. In 14 of the regions the outcomes were either identical or virtually the same, with only a single local seat moving between the parties. However, in four of the regions using SV in double-sized constituencies produced dramatic differences: these results are highlighted in italics in the right hand columns of Table 8. In the largest region, the south-east, SV would allow such an effective co-ordination of Labour and Liberal Democrat tactical voting that the Conservatives’ local seats would fall from 40 to 27, with 8 of these changes benefiting the Liberal Democrats, and 5 Labour. In the south-west the same effect would be even more dramatic, with the Tories losing all 14 of their AMS local seats; 11 of the gains would go to the Liberal Democrats and the rest to Labour. In the West Midlands country areas the Tories would lose five seats, four going to Labour. And in the eastern London subarban another two Tory seats would switch control. Nationwide under a 50:50 scheme the Tories local seats would drop from 91 under AMS to just 48 under SV Plus. Labour would gain 18 more local seats under SV Plus, and the Liberal Democrats would increase their locally elected MPs by more than two and a half.
half times from 14 to 18.

So long as half the House of Commons were elected via the top up mechanism these sharp differences introduced by a majority rule system for the local seats, would not have major implications for the parties’ total representation. There are more than enough top-up seats available to compensate for any additional imbalances of parties’ representation in the local seats. However, in schemes with more locally elected MPs there is a clear danger that the number of top-up seats could become too low to fully compensate for one party’s over-representation in locality contests. To see how this effect worked out in practice we again assumed that the local seat outcomes in each region for intermediate mixes of SV Plus would lie on a straight line from the 50:50 results given in Table 8 to the results when 100 per cent of MPs are elected in local constituencies using SV Pluses, shown in the penultimate row of Table 9 below. Then by interpolation we could estimate the local seats which would be won by parties in each region, for each intermediate combination of local and top-up seats under SV Pluses. With these data we could then determine how top-up seats would be best allocated in each region, and thus derive an overall number of regional seats for each party. Adding up the regional total seats then produces national total seat figures.

Table 9 shows the results of this exercise for Great Britain. For the 50:50 mix and the 57:43 mix the results are almost identical with the equivalent AMS schemes, and the DV scores are identical. But as the proportion of local seats rises to 67 per cent, so the SV Plus outcomes begin to resemble the Conservatives’ seats. Compared with the equivalent AMS schemes, the Conservatives lose 10 seats with a 67:33 mix of local and top-up MPs, 17 seats in the

| Table 8: How parties would have won local seats under 50:50 versions of SV Plus and AMS across 18 regions in the 1997 general election |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                 | Con    | Lab    | Lib Dem | SNP/PCS | Con    | Lab    | Lib Dem | SNP/PCS |
| Total seats     |        |        |         |        |        |        |         |        |
| 118             |        |        |         |        |        |        |         |        |
| South west      | 40     | 17     | 6       | 0      | 27     | 22     | 2       | 0      |
| South west      | 14     | 4      | 7       | 0      | 0      | 7      | 18      | 0      |
| East Midlands   | 6      | 15     | 16      | 0      | 6      | 15     | 0       | 0      |
| North West: urban | 1    | 20     | 1       | 0      | 0      | 20     | 2       | 0      |
| London suburbs  | 5      | 12     | 2       | 0      | 3      | 13     | 3       | 0      |
| Yorkshire: urban | 0    | 18     | 1       | 0      | 0      | 18     | 1       | 0      |
| Scotland Central | 0     | 18     | 6       | 0      | 0      | 18     | 0       | 0      |
| North           | 1      | 17     | 0       | 0      | 0      | 18     | 0       | 0      |
| London: middle  | 1      | 18     | 0       | 0      | 1      | 18     | 0       | 0      |
| West Midlands: rest | 7 | 8     | 0       | 0      | 0      | 12     | 1       | 0      |
| West Midlands: urban | 0 | 12     | 0       | 0      | 0      | 13     | 0       | 0      |
| Highlands       | 1      | 8      | 1       | 0      | 0      | 7      | 2       | 4      |
| North west: rest | 3    | 10     | 0       | 0      | 2      | 10     | 0       | 0      |
| East Anglia     | 7      | 4      | 0       | 0      | 3      | 8      | 0       | 0      |
| South Wales     | 0      | 11     | 0       | 0      | 0      | 11     | 0       | 0      |
| Met and North Wales | 0 | 6     | 1       | 0      | 0      | 6      | 1       | 1      |
| Yorkshire: rest | 4      | 5      | 0       | 0      | 5      | 5      | 1       | 0      |
| Scotland South  | 0      | 3      | 1       | 0      | 0      | 3      | 1       | 0      |
| Great Britain   | 91     | 204    | 14      | 4      | 48     | 222    | 38      | 5      |

Notes: In the SV Plus column, the figures in italic indicate regions where there were shifts of two or more seats between any two parties, compared with the classic AMS outcome in the same region.

| Table 9: How parties would have won seats under different variants of SV Plus (or AV Plus) in 1997 and 1992 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                 | Con    | Lab    | Lib Dem | SNP/PCS | Other | Total seats | Deviation from PR |
| 50% local: 50% top-up seats | 206    | 298    | 118     | 21     | 0     | 641     | 4.7     |
| 57% local: 43% top-up seats | 205    | 294    | 120     | 21     | 0     | 641     | 4.6     |
| 67% local: 33% top-up seats | 196    | 311    | 115     | 19     | 0     | 641     | 5.6     |
| 78% local: 22% top-up seats | 179    | 338    | 106     | 17     | 1     | 641     | 8.7     |
| 83% local: 17% top-up seats | 103    | 371    | 93      | 13     | 1     | 641     | 13.3    |
| 90% local: 10% top-up seats | 143    | 399    | 90      | 11     | 1     | 641     | 17.2    |
| Compare: 50% SV (or AV) | 110    | 438    | 84      | 10     | 1     | 641     | 23.5    |
| Compare plurality rule | 195    | 419    | 46      | 10     | 1     | 641     | 21      |

|                 |         |        |         |        |        |        |        |
| 1992            |         |        |         |        |        |        |        |
| 50% local: 50% top-up seats | 204    | 238    | 113     | 18     | 0     | 634     | 2.9     |
| 57% local: 43% top-up seats | 275    | 239    | 113     | 7      | 0     | 634     | 2.7     |
| 67% local: 33% top-up seats | 206    | 238    | 106     | 9      | 0     | 624     | 4.2     |
| 78% local: 22% top-up seats | 294    | 240    | 94      | 8      | 0     | 624     | 5.2     |
| 83% local: 17% top-up seats | 302    | 248    | 79      | 6      | 0     | 634     | 8.2     |
| 90% local: 10% top-up seats | 306    | 256    | 65      | 8      | 0     | 624     | 10.1    |
| Compare plurality rule | 336    | 271    | 20      | 7      | 0     | 634     | 17.7    |

Notes: Top-up seats are allocated in 18 regions in 1997, and in 14 regions in 1992. For a list of regions see Appendix 5.
75:25 scheme, 27 seats in the 83:17 mix and 38 seats in the 90:10 mix. Again compared with the equivalent AMS scheme, Labour’s gains start at 5 seats with the 67:33 mix, and rise consistently to 18 seats with the 90:10 mix. The Liberal Democrats’ take three gains with the 67:33 mix, rising consistently to 20 gains with the 90:10 mix. The nationalist parties would gain a single extra seat, but only with the 67:33 or the 75:25 mixes: at higher levels of local seats they would lose a seat compared with AMS.

The DV score for the SV Plus scheme with two thirds local seats is nearly 1 point higher than that for the same scheme under AMS. The greater disproportionality of SV Plus is 1.4 points with the 75:25 scheme, 2.5 points with the 83:16 scheme and 2.8 points at the 90:10 level. These higher DV scores mean that the 75:25 SV Plus variant falls just outside our benchmark 4 to 8 per cent range for a proportional system. DV scores for the two SV Plus schemes with even higher levels of local seats fall well outside the same range. But defenders of SV Plus could argue that the 83:17 mix achieves the same DV score as the Single Transferable Vote under the difficult 1997 conditions, and treats the Conservatives appreciably more fairly than does STV.

SV Plus introduces some important differences in how many local and top up seats are won by the major parties. Table 10 shows that both in the 50:50 SV Plus scheme and in the 75:25 scheme Labour would have won a greater proportion of its total seats in the local constituencies than under the equivalent AMS schemes. But Labour’s relative strength in 1997 means that this increase is not very big. The Conservatives would lose many local seats under SV compared with plurality rule, so that they would have been much more dependent on top up seats under SV Plus in 1997 conditions. By contrast, the Liberal Democrats would fare much better under SV Plus, with local seats more than doubling as a proportion of their total MPs under the 50:50 scheme, and almost doubling under the 75:25 scheme. The SNP and Plaid Cymru would also gain more local seats under the 75:25 scheme.

At a regional level under the 50:50 scheme the Conservatives would have no local seats in Wales, Scotland, the south west or northern industrial regions (the Yorkshire conurbation, North West conurbation, or the North), although they would gain at least one local seat in these areas under the 90:10 scheme. But the top up mechanism would give the Conservatives seats in every region under every SV Plus variant, just as AMS did. The Liberal Democrats would also benefit in most regions, but would end up with many seats in Wales and the West Midlands conurbation under SV Plus schemes with a preponderance of local seats.

Finally we remind readers again that the results for AV Plus would be identical to those for SV Plus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Con</th>
<th>Lib Dem</th>
<th>SNP/PC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local seats</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-up seats</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total seats</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of seats local</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare % of seats local under AMS</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 10: The number of local and top up seats won by the parties under two SV Plus schemes, on the 1997 voting patterns**
4. Implementing Electoral Reform

Even if the Jenkins Commission were to conclude from the evidence reviewed here that one or more mixed systems were viable options for inclusion in the government’s promised voting systems referendum, some additional issues inevitably arise in implementation terms. In any country changing the electoral system used for the national legislature is a very difficult maneuver to accomplish, since the established MPs and parties all have considerable vested interests in avoiding or minimizing changes. In the British case, the task of the Jenkins Commission in steering a course towards a referendum is complicated by two additional issues – the timings of change; and the likely impact of the Commission’s proposals on the eventual outcome of the voting systems referendum.

The possible timings of reform
The Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos both contained definite pledges that UK voters would have a chance to decide between maintaining plurality rule (first past the post) elections, or endorsing instead a ‘single proportional system’. The promised referendum would take place at some point before the next general election – which is likely to occur somewhere between autumn 2001 and May 2002. If the referendum is delayed, so that it takes place close to the next general election (or conceivably at the same time), then a majority vote for reform could not be implemented before the subsequent general election in 2006 or 2007. If the referendum occurs in 1999 or 2000 and results in a vote for reform, then legislation would have to be prepared and passed through Parliament to enact the change. If the chosen system involves any form of redistricting, the Boundary Commission would then have to draw up any new draft constituency boundaries, hold public consultation hearings on its proposals, and produce a finalized set of decisions. Given the lengthy timescale of similar past exercises simply rearranging constituencies under plurality rule, and the amount of representations made by the political parties, local authorities and the public, then even with an early referendum it would seem to be impossible for any electoral system involving new boundaries to be established in time for 2001 or 2002. The only reforms which involve no changes of boundaries at all would be a switch to either SV or AV on its own. But we showed in Making Votes Count that both systems would have been more disproportional than plurality rule elections in 1997 conditions, although not in 1992.

There are some other intermediate possibilities, however. The first is that for some systems new constituencies could be created by simply amalgamating existing Westminster seats, rather than drawing new boundaries. The key systems here are STV and List PR (both of which would involve amalgamating existing constituencies in order to form at least five member seats); and the 58-50 versions of AMS and SV Plus or AV Plus (which involve pairing Westminster constituencies to form double-sized local seats). Such systems could potentially be fast-tracked for much speedier and simpler Boundary Commission consideration, focusing solely on which current constituencies should be linked up with which others. However, even here the issues may be more complex than they seem at first sight. For instance if a constituency has contiguous boundaries with four or five other constituencies, then it could be paired with any of them; and each of the five possible schemes would create ramifications across other constituencies in the surrounding region. Nor will aggregating existing constituencies into fives or pairs always be feasible, so ‘odd’ sized seats will be needed under any scheme, and there may be considerable disputes about such anomalies. (In mixed systems, however, small anomalies may be less controversial, since the topping up process will normally compensate for any consequent misrepresentation in local seats).

The second set of intermediate possibilities involve systems which could be implemented in two stages. The only candidates here are SV Plus and AV Plus variants with a majority or pro representation of local seats. Here the SV or AV systems for electing constituency MPs could be implemented immediately in time for 2001 or 2002 for all MPs. Meanwhile the Boundary Commission could get on with drawing up new boundaries for local seats, and hence creating the space for regionally allocated top-up MPs, so that the full system could be used for the second general election due in 2006 or 2007. This two-part implementation would give voters and parties time to become accustomed to the operations of the majority system at constituency level. (One problem here is that the first general election might result in a more disproportional outcome than under plurality rule. But even this possibility could be guarded against – for instance by introducing a small number of extra MPs (between 5% and 10%) for one Parliament only, which would be allocated on a national basis to any parties which were severely under-represented at the election. But such a temporary expedient might create more complications in explaining reform proposals to voters than it would resolve).

Table 11 summarizes how these timing issues affect the alternative systems if the voting systems referendum takes place in 1999 or 2000. The most difficulties are raised for variants of AMS which involve either a majority or a strong pro representation of local seats over top-up seats. Here if voters endorsed a change of electoral system, they would none the less have to use plurality rule unchanged at the first subsequent general election, with reform only affecting general elections from 2006 onwards. If the referendum was delayed until 2001 or 2002 then this difficulty would diminish, since the time frame would make immediate implementation infeasible.

Table 11: How timing considerations vary across alternative voting systems, assuming a referendum by 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What could be implemented</th>
<th>by 2001?</th>
<th>by 2006?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SV alone or AV alone</td>
<td>whole system</td>
<td>whole system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50:50 AMS</td>
<td>whole system</td>
<td>whole system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50:50 SV Plus or AV Plus</td>
<td>whole system</td>
<td>whole system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STV or List PR</td>
<td>whole system</td>
<td>whole system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other SV Plus or AV Plus variants</td>
<td>change of novel constituency voting method</td>
<td>whole system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other AMS variants</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>whole system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The choice of systems and prospects for the referendum
The Jenkins Commission’s brief is to bring forward a single broadly proportional system for inclusion in the referendum – essentially to coax and persuade the notoriously fussy supporters of electoral reform to coalesce around a single alternative to plurality rule elections. The rationale for this brief is that only if a consensus can be reached amongst electoral reformers can the electorate be given a meaningful referendum choice. It is not formally part of the Commission’s job to consider how the referendum campaign itself might map out, nor to maximize the chances of the public
endorsing reform. But obviously the process of achieving agreement amongst electoral reformers on an alternative system would be easier if one system was clearly more likely to enhance the chances of winning the referendum.

We noted above in Table 7 that STV ballot papers have consistently been less popular with respondents in our surveys than those for either AMS or SV plus and AV plus. But Table 7 only gauges reactions to ballot papers, rather than to a whole alternative system of voting. At this stage of public debate about voting reform, it is considerably harder to explain whole systems to people in the context of a short survey questionnaire. But both in 1997 and 1998 we also ran questions where we sought to give respondents a minimal idea of what different systems would imply, and then get them to indicate a preference. Our approach was based on the type of question actually used in the 1993 New Zealand referendum. ICM's interviewers asked people to look at different mock referendum ballot cards, comparing "the existing system of voting" with an alternative system. Each referendum card made clear in a very few words how MPs would be elected under the alternative system. Key points covered were - whether MPs would have a local majority; whether the alternative system would be fully proportional in awarding Commons seats to parties, or more proportional than the present system, or not proportional; and whether the alternative system would tend to produce coalition governments, single-party governments, or a mixture of the two.

Figure 4 shows the 1997 card, which used an AMS
system as the reform alternative (but deliberately did not spell out in detail the precise variant of AMS being used). Figure 5 shows the first of two referendum questions asked in 1998. It pitted the plurality system against ‘a more proportional system of voting’, which could be either SV Plus or AV Plus. The question was asked after respondents had just completed both the SV Plus and AV Plus ballot papers. Figure 6 shows the second 1998 referendum card. It used the Single Transferable Vote as the alternative system, and was asked after respondents had just filled in the STV ballot paper.

Table 12 shows the three mock referendum results. The two 1998 results show somewhat more ‘don’t knows’ respondents compared with 1997, up from one in seven to one in five. Support for the existing system of voting was marginally lower in 1998 than immediately after the general election. The percentage of people opting for a change of voting system is stable across AMS in 1997 and SV Plus in 1998, but lower with STV as the reform alternative. On all three referendum ballots the balance of opinion is close.

Since both surveys were carried out long before any public campaign for a voting systems referendum has begun, we might expect that these results would suggest that public attitudes remain uncertain. Both sides in an eventual referendum still seem to have everything to play for, with no clear movement for or against reform since the general election. From Table 12 we cannot draw any additional conclusions about differences in the public’s response to the three systems tested.

However, we were able to analyse further the distribution of pro-reform and status quo responses in both years across social classes and different regions of Britain, using the SV Plus results for 1998. Table 13 shows that in 1998 there was a stronger social class basis to people’s responses. The AV group showed a definite reform lead, while in the DC group there was a net lead for keeping plurality rules elections. Since middle class people are more likely to vote in an eventual referendum, these results provide some indication that the reform coalition’s position may be stronger than it looks. There is also a strong regional patterning of responses, with support for reform options firmest in Scotland, and then Wales and the North, and weakest in the Midlands and the South.

Table 12: Mock referendum outcomes comparing the status quo with three alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative system tested</th>
<th>% for status quo</th>
<th>% for change</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>Lead for change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMS (in 1997)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>+ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus/AV Plus (in 1998)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>+ 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STV (in 1998)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>- 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Responses in 1998 on keeping the existing system or choosing an SV Plus/AV Plus system, by social class and by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>% for Status quo</th>
<th>% for Change</th>
<th>Maj for change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+ 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>+ 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>- 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>- 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% for Status quo</th>
<th>% for Change</th>
<th>Maj for change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>+ 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>+ 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>+ 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>- 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>- 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

Labour and the Liberal Democrats both promised in their election manifestos to hold a referendum on a 'single proportional alternative' system to the current first-past-the-post elections. But their underlying positions remain distinct. If each party could pick its ideal system, the distance between them would remain considerable. Most of the Labour leadership would probably prefer to keep the present Westminster constituencies and bring in a small change to a majority rule system, either SV or AV, which would make Labour and Liberal Democrat tactical voting easier at the expense of the Tories. The big problem for Labour is that neither of these methods is a proportional system. In 1992 both SV and AV would have been somewhat more proportional than first-past-the-post, but in 1997 they would have been far less proportional, pushing the Tories down to only 110 seats instead of the 165 they actually got, and delivering an even more exaggerated Labour majority in the Commons. While restless souls in Labour's ranks still claim that SV or AV should be adopted by the Jenkins Commission, to hold a referendum on a non-proportional system alone would obviously breach Labour's manifesto pledge. It would also be hard to justify the cost of holding a referendum over such a small and non-fundamental shift from plurality rule.

But in looking at more far-reaching alternatives Labour remains absolutely wedded to the idea that single-member local constituencies for Westminster MPs must be retained, seeing them as a key aspect of Parliament, popular with voters and part of a strong British tradition of MPs' personal accountability. Of course, part of Labour's enthusiasm has less to do with localization than with the implications of constituency elections for partisan control of government. The exasperative power of plurality rule consists in 659 constituencies means that whichever of the major parties is more popular can realistically hope to form a single-party government with a working majority in Parliament – even though neither the Conservatives or Labour have achieved majority support in any election since 1951. Labour wants to retain its chance of forming a single-party government, and to avoid creating a situation where every government needs Liberal Democrat support – making them a permanent power-broker despite their substantially lower levels of votes.

Meanwhile the Liberal Democrats' formal initial position to the Jenkins Commission remains a demand for all single-member local constituencies to be abolished. Instead they want to bring in STV, where people vote by numbering multiple candidates, and can choose whether to support a party slate or vote for people they like drawn from different parties. STV also entails creating multi-member constituencies (with around 250,000 electors in each) where parties could be rewarded seats in proportion to their vote. Labour has always resisted STV, because it quells constituency populations and removes the link between a single local MP and their own area. More importantly, Labour fears that STV will undermine the unity of all parties, forcing candidates from the same party to compete with each other, and creating party discipline. In their eyes STV could encourage voters to 'pick and mix' who they vote for in ways that will damage Labour's strongholds. And Labour correctly believes that the system would favour the Liberal Democrats even more than other proportional systems would do.

The central question for the Jenkins Commission has therefore become how to bridge the gap between these rival Labour and Liberal Democrat positions on reform. Can a solution be found in particular which will carry Tony Blair and the majority of Labour MPs into the electoral reform lobby, campaigning for change at an eventual referendum rather than campaigning for the status quo? The attraction of mixed systems is that they have already afforded the basis for a compromise between these two parties in the arrangements chosen for Scotland, Wales and London. So can a similar approach hold out a feasible system for Westminster elections also?

The data reviewed here show that variants of either AMS or SV Plus (and AV Plus) with between 57 and 67 per cent of MPs elected from local constituencies, would fully meet the requirement for a proportional system. Table 14 shows how many seats the parties would have won in the two 1997 general elections under all the alternative systems

Table 14: Comparing the seats won by the parties in Britain under alternative electoral systems, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting method</th>
<th>Lab</th>
<th>Con</th>
<th>Lib Dem</th>
<th>SNP/PC</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>DV score (%)</th>
<th>Lab majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballot (SV)</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>+213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Vote (AV)</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>+213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual effective (First past the post)</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>+213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus (50:50 variant)</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>+133</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMS (65:35 variant)</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>+97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Transferable Vote (STV)</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>+28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus (50:50 variant)</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>+83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMS (65:35 variant)</td>
<td>354</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>+49</td>
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<tr>
<td>SV Plus (75:25 variant)</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMS (75:25 variant)</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus (67:33 variant)</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMS (67:33 variant)</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus (75:25 variant)</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMS (75:25 variant)</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Plus (50:50 variant)</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMS (50:50 variant)</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-69</td>
</tr>
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<td>110</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Results for SV Plus are the same as for SV Plus. 'Others' includes Northern Ireland seats.

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covered in both our reports. The variants of AMS and SV Plus (or AV Plus) which mirror the Scottish, London and Welsh arrangements emerge as reliably proportional in their operations. At 75:25 and 50:50 SV Plus, they are clearly the best performing systems in delivering proportional outcomes.

A further surprising outcome of our current research is that the Jenkins Commission could legitimately consider an AMS system structured on the lines of the mid-1970s Hansard Society report, which recommended a mix of 75 per cent local seats and 25 per cent top-up seats. The Commission's terms of reference enjoin it to find a system which meets the condition of 'broad proportionality', rather than necessarily to choose the most proportional system. With DV scores of 7 per cent in the difficult 1997 conditions and 6.6 per cent in the easier 1992 election, the 75:25 AMS system can be regarded as broadly proportional in its operation - although not as proportional as either AMS or SV Plus variants with fewer local seats.

Even more astonishing, the 75:25 mix for SV Plus (and AV Plus) would also meet the broad proportionality requirement. In 1997 the DV score would fall only very marginally outside the 4 to 8 per cent range we indicated as the appropriate proportionality benchmark. This score is still a credible performance for an unusual general election where the leading party was 14 percentage points clear of its nearest rival, and where 4.4 per cent of voters nationwide cast votes for small parties whom it is difficult to see getting represented in Parliament under almost any electoral system. In 1992, the 75:25 variant of SV Plus (or AV Plus) would have performed within the benchmark range.

Variants of SV Plus (SV AV) with even more MPRs (83 or 90 per cent) elected from local constituencies would clearly not qualify as proportional systems, however. At 13 to 17 per cent their 1997 DV scores fell well outside the benchmark range. And although these systems have better absolute scores in the earlier 1992 conditions, they are clearly not (in line with those then achieved by other proportional systems. The same conclusion applies to the AMS variant with 50 per cent local seats.

But a final surprising twist in our results here is that it might just be feasible to make a case for the broad proportionality of an AMS system where as many as five out of every six MPs was elected for a local constituency. The 83:17 AMS mix had a DV score of just under 11 per cent in 1997, around half that of the existing voting system, and lower than would have been achieved by STV. In 1992 it achieved a score at the top of our benchmark range. This AMS variant performed better than the SV Plus (or AV Plus) systems with the same mix of local and top-up seats because at the local seats stage plurality rule protected the Tories more than a majoritarian system.

Many Labour proponents of reform believe that if the additional or top-up members in AMS or SV Plus are kept to a minimum needed to get broad proportionality, then Labour could still form a government on its own in its strong election years - such as 1945, 1966 or 1997. And indeed Table 14 shows that in 1997 the 83:17 AMS variant would have delivered a Labour overall majority of 49, while the SV Plus 75:25 variant would have given a narrower majority of 17. The AMS 75:25 variant would have given Labour an overall majority of just two. This 'window of opportunity' is on the face of it a pretty narrow one, so long as the Jenkins Commission genuinely adhered to a 'broad proportionality' criterion, but Labour exponents of this argument believe that dynamic campaign effects could expand the chances securing single party governments. Of course, the Conservatives might also be able to form a single-party government in years when they run well ahead of Labour and the Liberal Democrats (at 1983 or 1987). But for many Labour MPs the risk of Tory majority governments would be worth bearing in order to stop the Liberal Democrats becoming a permanent party of government under full proportional representation. Such partisan considerations will have to be seriously considered by the Jenkins Commission, if only for prudential reasons of maximizing support amongst Labour MPs and the Labour leadership. The Commission's brief also requires it to consider 'the need for stable government'.

Labour's fears are not simply partisan paranoia, however. There is a large body of research in political science into the process of coalition formation in 'hung' legislatures where no one party has an overall majority. The literature demonstrates theoretically and empirically a risk that objectively 'excessive' amounts of coalitional power in making or breaking governments will accrue to a centre party which straddles the position of the 'median voter' in the legislature. The Liberal Democrats would almost certainly be positioned in this way in a House of Commons elected under a fully proportional voting system, just as the much smaller Free Democrats party in Germany have been almost permanently involved in coalition governments there. If a similar situation occurred after every election, then a new voting system which secured hyper-proportionality in seat allocations might well not secure broad proportionality in power allocations between the parties. The governmental or coalitional power of parties might well bear little relationship to their vote shares. Again the flexibility provided by mixed systems may prove an important way for the Jenkins Commission to address such potential problems in a fair-minded and balanced way.

The final important finding of our research is that the regions adopted for allocating top-up seats under either AMS or SV Plus (and AV Plus) do not make any significant difference to how mixed systems perform. There is no need to stick with very large and remote regions (such as the government's 11 regions for allocating European Parliament seats) for fear that smaller regions would increase disproportionality. We showed here that an 18 region scheme where top up MPs represent considerably smaller and more socially homogeneous areas would have delivered equally good results in the difficult 1997 conditions. So not only can local MPs in proportional mixed systems represent smaller local constituency areas than we previously knew were feasible, so can top-up MPs.
Appendix 1: Technical details

Regions
In 1992 we basically used government standard regions as they were then configured, but made additional distinctions within Scotland between three regions, giving 13 regions in all:

- South East, Greater London, East Anglia, South West, West Midlands, East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, North West, North Wales, East and Southern Scotland, Strathclyde, the Highlands.

In 1997 we used government standard regions, but distinguished within the main urban regions between conurbation areas and the remainder. We also used two regions in Wales, three regions in Scotland, and distinguished between middle London and the London suburbs, giving 18 regions in all:

- South East, Middle London, London Suburbs, East Anglia, South West, West Midlands conurbation, West Midlands rest, East Midlands, Yorkshire conurbations (including both South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire), Yorkshire rest, North West conurbations (includes Greater Manchester and Merseyside), North West rest, the North, Scotland South, Central Scotland, the Highlands, Mid and North Wales, South Wales.

Data presented in Tables 4 and 9 on how the parties performed in 1997 were also recomputed for the new government standard regions, being used in the 1999 European elections. The main change here is the creation of a large ‘Eastern’ region including East Anglia plus a large north-eastern segment of the old South East area; and the extension of the North West region to include the Lake District, which is now separated from the North West. The 11 component regions are thus:

The 1998 ICM Questionnaire

- READ OUT: I WOULD NOW LIKE TO SHOW YOU SOME DIFFERENT TYPES OF BALLOT FORMS THAT CAN BE USED FOR VOTING IN ELECTIONS. AND I'D LIKE YOU TO ACT AS IF YOU WERE VOTING IN A GENERAL ELECTION.

Q19. BALLOT 1: Supplementary Vote

- (READ OUT: HAND RESIDENT BALLOT 1 SHEET 1 & READ OUT):
- In this system, first vote for a candidate and party to represent your local constituency, using this ballot form. You have two votes. Please vote in the columns for your most preferred party or candidate.

INTERVIEWER: POINT TO 1st COLUMN

And now, please cast a second vote to be cast in case your first choice cannot win in this constituency. INTERVIEWER: POINT TO 2nd COLUMN.

If respondent had difficulty understanding what to do, show the example ballot paper, and explain (READ OUT):

If my first choice was [name of party or candidate], I would put an 'X' here.

Then, my second choice was [name of party or candidate], I would put an 'X' here.

IF YOU ARE ASKED: the respondent CAN vote for the same party twice, but the second vote will not make a difference.

Q20. INTERVIEWER: WAS ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION USED?

- TURN OVER BALLOT 1, TO SHOW SHEET 2

Q21. And now, on this second ballot, please vote for one party to shape the overall balance of party seats in parliament.

You may choose to support the same party or a different party.

If respondent had difficulty understanding what to do, show the example ballot paper, and explain (READ OUT):

If I preferred the [name of party or candidate], I would put an 'X' here.

Q22. INTERVIEWER: WAS ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION USED?

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Q5c How much would you like to vote this way in the future? Please use a 1 to 7 scale where 1 means dislike to vote this way a lot, and 7 means would like to vote this way a lot. You can, of course, give any mark in between. Please mark your score on the ballot paper.

Q6a Ballot 2: Alternative Vote

- HAND RESPONSANT BALLOT 2, SHEET 1 & READ OUT:
  In this system, again vote first for a candidate and party to represent your local constituency, using this ballot paper.
  You can vote for as many or as few candidates as you like by numbering them 1, 2, 3, 4 etc in order of your preference.

- IF RESPONDENT HAS DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO DO, SHOW THE EXAMPLE BALLOT PAPER, AND EXPLAIN ...... (READ OUT)
  If my first choice was Simon Hughes of the Liberal Democrats, I would write a '1' in here
  Then, if my second choice was John Prescott of Labour, I would write a '2' in here, Alternatively, if my second choice had been Hillary Jago from the Green Party, I would in a '2' in here.

Q6b INTERVIEWER: WAS ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION USED?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6c TURN OVER BALLOT 2, TO SHOW SHEET 2

Q6c And now, on this second sheet, please mark ONE vote for a party to shape the overall balance of party seats in Parliament.

You may choose to vote for a party you have already supported, or for a different party.

- IF RESPONDENT HAS DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO DO, SHOW THE EXAMPLE BALLOT PAPER, AND EXPLAIN ...... (READ OUT)
  If I preferred the Labour Party, I would put an 'X' in here

Q6d INTERVIEWER: WAS ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION USED?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6d How much would you like to vote this way in the future? Please use a 1 to 7 scale where 1 means dislike to vote this way a lot, and 7 means would like to vote this way a lot. You can, of course, give any mark in between. Please mark your score on the ballot paper.

Q6a Ballot 3: Single-Transferable Vote

- HAND RESPONSANT BALLOT 3, SHEET 1 & READ OUT

Another way of voting would be to elect several MPs to represent a larger constituency. Could you look at this ballot paper and choose as many or as few candidates as you like, numbering them 1, 2 etc up to a maximum of 17. You may choose candidates from the same or different parties.

- IF RESPONDENT HAS DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO DO, SHOW THE EXAMPLE BALLOT PAPER, AND EXPLAIN ...... (READ OUT)
  If my first choice candidate was Angela Rumbold of Party A, I would write '1' in here. ......If my second choice was Michael Ancram from Party A I would write a '2' here, Alternatively if my second choice had been Matthew Taylor from Party C, I would write a '2' in here etc.

In this ballot you can show your preferences for individual party members as well as the party itself. You can number the candidates from 1 up to a maximum of 17, in order of preference.

Q6b INTERVIEWER: WAS ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION USED?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6c How much would you like to vote this way in the future? Please use a 1 to 7 scale where 1 means dislike to vote this way a lot, and 7 means would like to vote this way a lot. You can, of course, give any mark in between. Please mark your score on the ballot paper.
About the LSE Public Policy Group

The LSE Public Policy Group is a coalition of academics, mainly from the Department of Government, London School of Economics, but also drawing on other LSE departments and experts from outside the School. The PPG undertakes policy-relevant research and consultancy - on policy evaluation, institutional design and public administration, electoral analysis and social surveys generally.

On 'public interest' projects, PPG often works closely with other non-governmental organisations, including the Democratic Audit, Charter 88, the Institute for Public Policy Research, and the LSE Methodologies Institute. For consultancy work, PPG operates as part of Enterprise LSE, the consultancy arm of the LSE.

Recent work carried out by PPG includes:
- a report on alternative electoral systems for electing the new London Mayor and Assembly, commissioned by the Government Office for London
- a report for Adamson Associates of Hammersmith on the new system for elected Members of the European Parliament in the UK.

The Group also publishes a full series of 'Papers in Public Policy', covering topics on public administration, public policy and electoral analysis. Please contact:

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Tel: 071 955 7999 e-mail: p.dunleavy@lse.ac.uk

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The following PPG publications closely related to this report are available from the address above. Prices include p&p. Please make all cheques payable to 'London School of Economics'.

Replaying the 1992 General Election: How Britain Would Have Voted Under Alternative Electoral Systems by Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Maravas and Stuart Weir
July 1992 £5

Devolution Votes: How electors in Scotland and Wales will vote for the devolved assemblies by Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Maravas and Stuart Weir
September 1997 £2.75


Counting on Europe: PR and the 1999 Euro-Elections by Patrick Dunleavy, Simon Hix and Helen Maravas Published by Adamson Associates Ltd, Brussels, but available from PPG March 1998 £15

Open or Closed List Voting for the European Parliament Elections: the 'State of the Nation' report by Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Maravas and Stuart Weir
February 1996 £4

About the Democratic Audit

The Democratic Audit is a consortium of academics, journalists and others who are together assessing and reporting on the quality of democracy and political freedoms in the UK. The Audit monitors democracy and political freedom in Britain through a series of reports at regular intervals. The Democratic Audit is based at the Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, but its members also belong to other universities and institutions. It is sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, but receives grants and fees from other sources.

In September 1996, the Audit published the first of two major 'landmark' reports, The Three Pillars of Liberty (by Francesca Klig, Keir Starmer and Stuart Weir, Routledge), on the protection of political and civil rights in the United Kingdom. The second major landmark report on democratic controls on the executive will be published in November by Routledge.

The intention is to follow up these two 'landmark' studies with a further major report on democracy and political freedom under the Blair government. The purpose is to enable the public to judge whether this country is becoming more or less democratic and free.

The Democratic Audit has published ground-breaking reports on quangos in the UK, and cooperated with Channel 4 Dispatches on a documentary on advisory quangos, Behind Closed Doors. Its most recent report is Quangos on the Internet, a study by lain Blythe which exposed the deficiencies of the government's website on quangos. The Democratic Audit is currently preparing an International Almanac on Elections and Voting for the forthcoming referendum on electoral systems in the United Kingdom, and a benchmark report on economic and social rights in the UK.

The Audit undertakes consultancy and educational work in the UK and abroad, and organises international courses on seminars on democracy and freedom. Most recently, consultants from the Audit have been working with a Parliamentary Reform Committee of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, seeking to strengthen its contribution to democratic practice and executive semignty in that country.

Auditing Democracy

The Democratic Audit publishes up to six reports on democratic and human rights issues every year. You can become an annual subscriber for £15 per annum. () You can also order reports individually from Scowman Trust Enterprises, Union House, 3-11 Pine Street, London EC1R 0BH. Please include postage and packing. All Democratic Audit papers are published jointly by Scowman Trust Enterprises and the Human Rights Centre, University of Essex.


The International Almanac on Elections and Voting, edited by Ian Blythe and Stuart Weir. Popular guide for the referendum on voting for Westminster on electoral systems in practice, election mechanisms, coalition making and coalition government around the world and the Jenkins report. Special pre-publication price: £12.50

Please send any comments you may have on this or other Democratic Audit publication to:
Professor Kevin Boyle
Human Rights Centre
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ

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