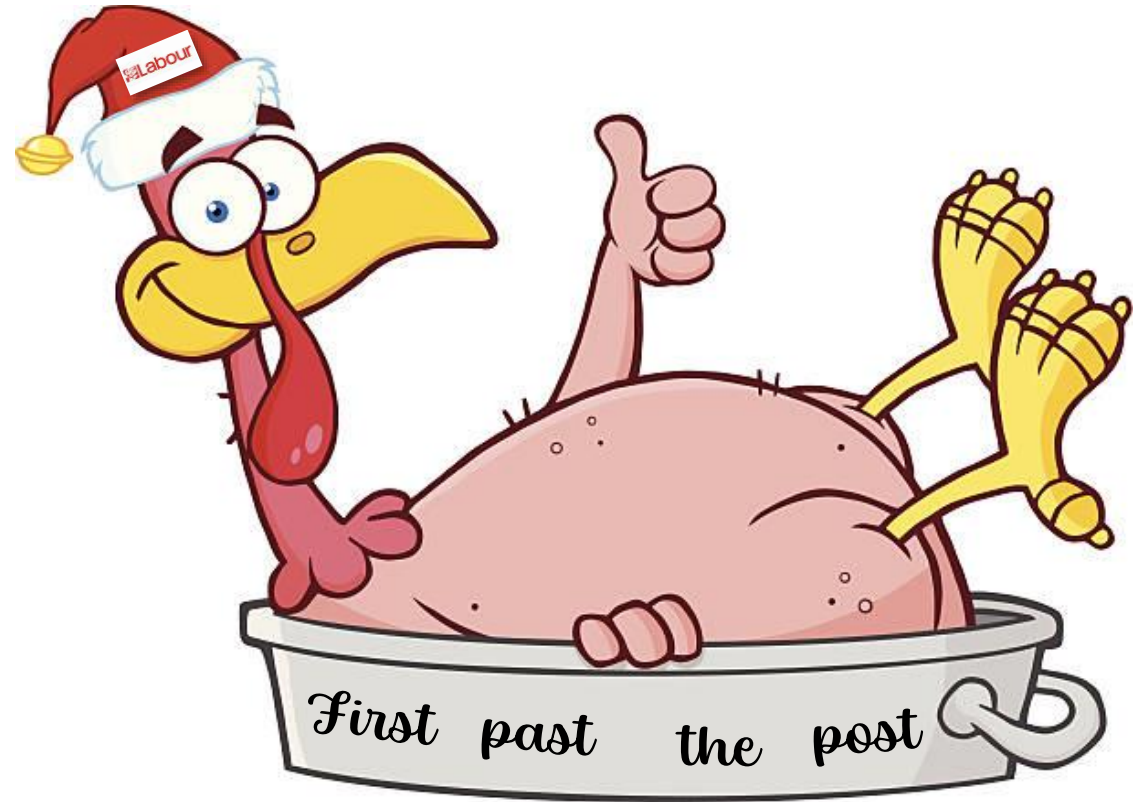


FPTP & Inequality

Part V

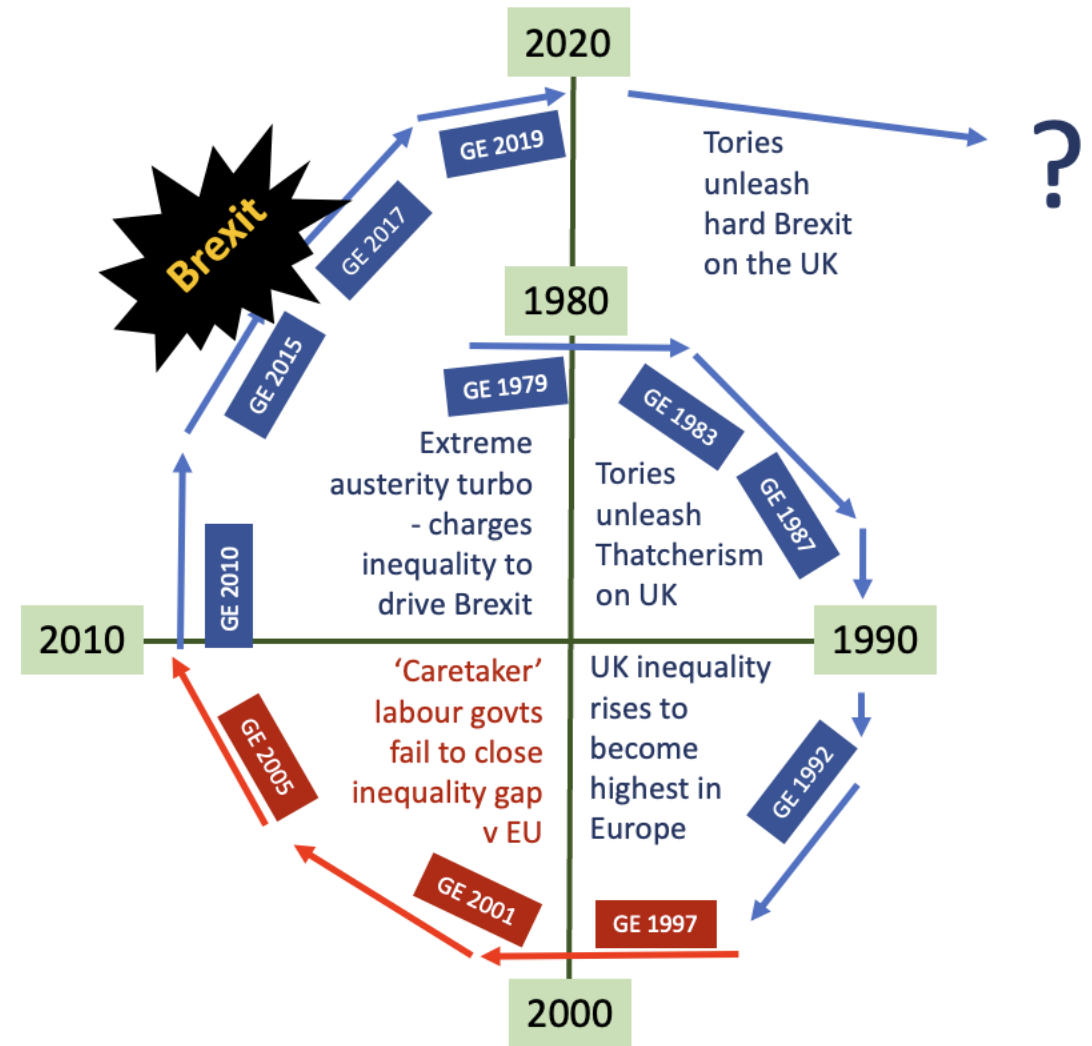
From FPTP to PR: asking turkeys to vote for Xmas

Why moving to PR is almost
impossible for FPTP countries





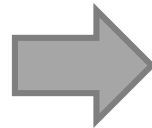
Stuart Donald
2022

- As we enter 2023, the FPTP mechanism has brought us back to where we were in 1980
- Despite the decades of increasing inequality, the resulting misery and Brexit, the FPTP system still allows the party that caused it all to reign supreme...
- If ever FPTP looked broken it is now... so surely, time for PR?

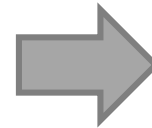


Support for PR across UK parties

	 Green Party		
party membership supportive of PR?	✓	✓	✗
parliamentary party supportive of PR?	✓	✗	✗

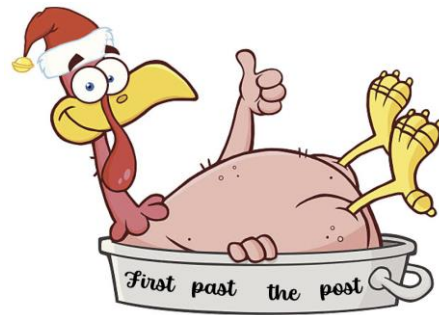


Today in 2023, there is majority support for PR across progressive party memberships as well the electorate



But Labour and Tory MPs share support to maintain FPTP:

- most Tory MPs (c 360)
 - 50% of Labour MPs (c 100)
- } = 70% of all MPs oppose PR



Key takeaway - PR lobby faces major hurdle as long as parliament full of turkeys who see PR as Xmas

The challenge of moving to PR

I. Barriers to PR: local Labour conflicts

II. Barriers to PR: objections of the wider UK establishment

III. Barriers to PR: recent precedents

IV. Final Conclusion



Challenge

What threat does PR pose?

Why does the moral case for PR not prevail?

Likely outcome

1. Labour party leaders want majority power, only available under FPTP



Coalition oriented PR much less attractive for successful leaders than total power of FPTP



Most Labour leaders never become PMs so those with a chance of election are loathe to dilute their brief shot at power by trading Majoritarian authority for negotiated PR



History is littered with many instances where PR has been promised by a prospective PM and then denied on winning a majority victory under FPTP; in short, the lure of majoritarian power outweighs electoral promises and/or commitment to social justice



2. PR will mean many Labour MPs lost their jobs



Since 1980, Labour have enjoyed between 30 and 130 more seats on average than their vote share merits



Many Labour MPs remain in seat for many terms across Labour's dozens of safe seats (98/201 currently), albeit mostly in opposition. With PR, many of them would be at risk of losing their seats when the non-proportional allocation is removed.



For most UK MPs, they've only ever experienced the adversarial, two party world of UK politics. Many may genuinely (or wishfully) believe that one day Labour can make a difference in power and so would prefer to keep trying under the status quo (whether or not they privately recognise the inherent conflict)



Challenge

3. PR threatens to break up the 'old church'



PR will eventually cause the multiple factions within the broader Labour party to splinter

What threat does PR pose?

Labour is one of the largest parties in the world; many MPs and other party members will struggle to vote for an electoral system that will likely break up their party to which many have given their lives and careers

Why does the moral case for PR not prevail?

The impotence of the UK left under FPTP has created a siege mentality; this lack of success makes progressive ambition more about the tribalism of the Labour movement, obscuring the aims of social justice

Likely outcome



4. Loss of guaranteed role as official opposition



PR will allow parties other than Labour to form the opposition

Over the decades, Labour have got used to the norm of being the official opposition; PR would remove this privileged alternative to government, allowing other parties to compete more easily with Labour for 2nd party status (this has already happened to Labour in Scotland)

Many MPs get comfortable with being in opposition; they remain visible and popular among constituents even though a minority in parliament. The threat of upheaval posed by PR is one of the conflicts behind why so many Labour MPs are against it



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Challenge

5. Unlikely that 'pure' PR can win a majority in initial parliamentary bill



Tory led pro-FPTP lobby will try to materially dilute PR in parliament

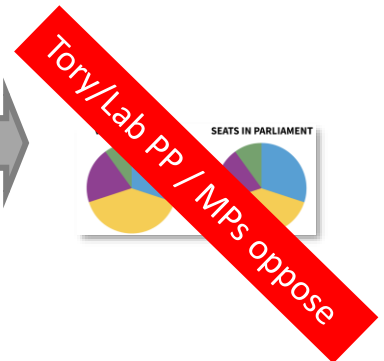
What threat does PR pose?

PR would end Tory hegemony in UK politics and probably break up their party; for this reason, they have an incentive to water down PR; opponents may also force a referendum

Why does the moral case for PR not prevail?

Tory and many Labour MPs will put the survival of their parties and careers ahead of any alleged benefits to democracy through PR

Likely outcome



6. Not clear PR deliverable within one or even two non-Tory gov terms

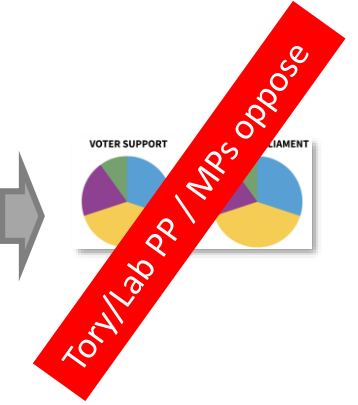


Even with two consecutive terms, not likely Labour can deliver pure PR given challenge and perception around priority

Some believe that pure PR is only achievable in two steps; 1. implement AV first (Labour will support since more damaging for Tories); and 2. offer ref on pure PR.

If a complex process like this needs to be followed, it will likely need more time

The conflicts on both Tory and Labour benches mean that they will take the opportunity to stall and thwart PR, whether they recognise the moral case for PR or not



Challenge

7. High risk that a referendum will be lost



If a referendum on pure PR was secured, major establishment funding would be raised to fight

What threat does PR pose?

There would be more opposition to a pure PR system than anything; the Brexit lobby as well as the landed classes would fear far greater scope for materially less conservative / Liberal policies. In the AV vote in 2011, the FPTP camp delivered over 40m leaflets v 9m by the AV side, and spent over £7m to support (AV spent only £1.5)

Why does the moral case for PR not prevail?

The powerful and landed have no interest in a more progressive state; it can only mean more constraints, tax and general interference in their lives

Likely outcome



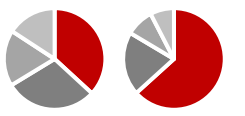
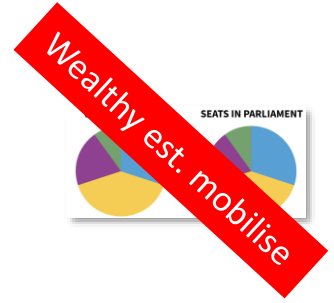
8. High risk that establishment reverse move to pure PR



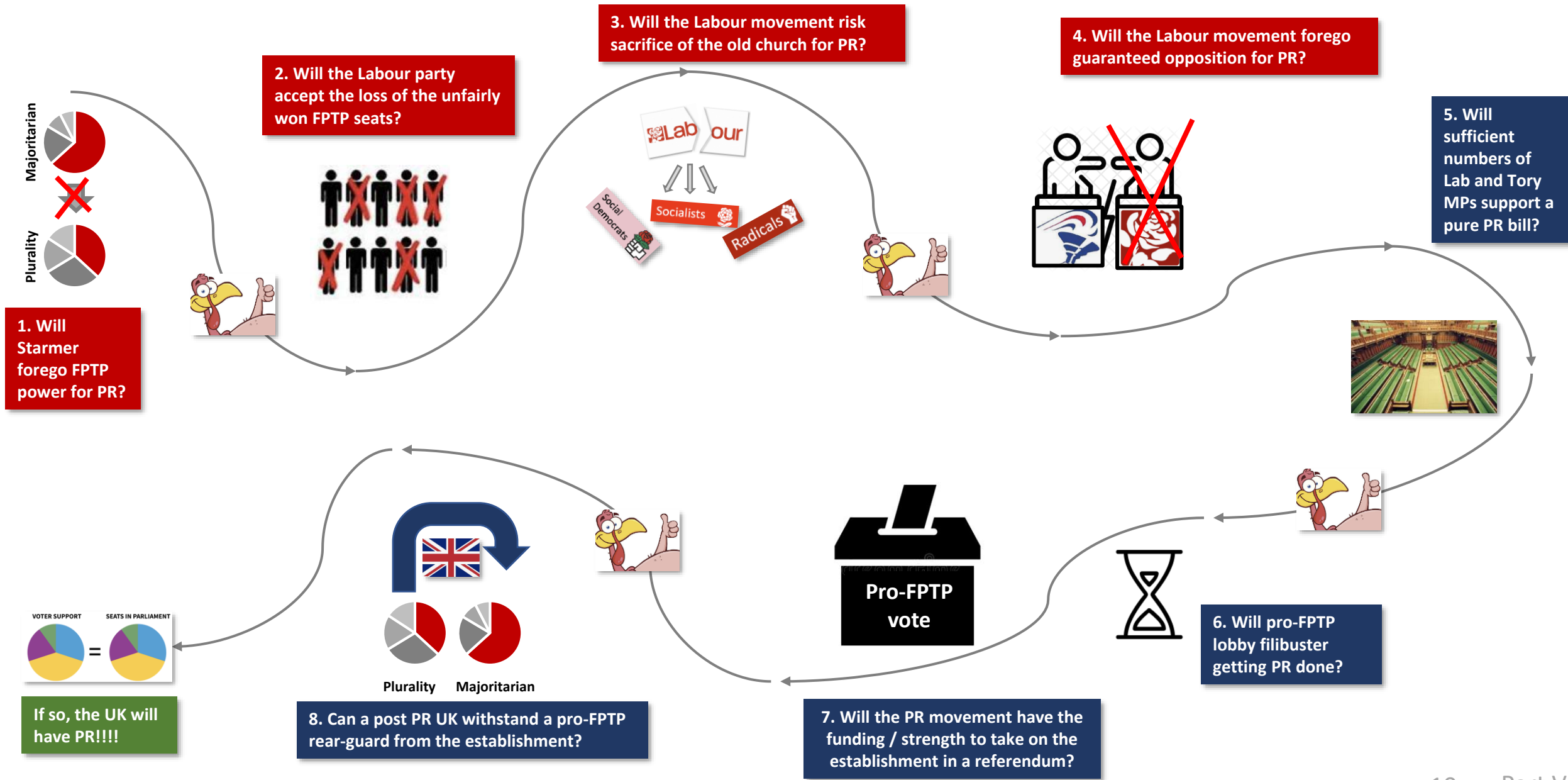
Wealthy establishment will look at any and all means to re-establish their control on power

Maybe more difficult once into PR, but if there is any chance to reverse the onset of a more progressive future in the UK, the wealthy / landed establishment will be prepared to fund and fight.

The aim would be to reverse PR and probably try to prevent it coming back.



Plurality Majoritarian



- UK Labour's parliamentary party continues to show that they are prepared to compromise the moral case for PR to protect the interests of leadership ambitions, careers and the 2nd party privilege under the FPTP system
- Even if there is a Lab/Lib coalition, as long as there is a majority of Labour and Tory MPs against PR, it will be thwarted
- The wider UK establishment is expected to put up as vigorous a fight to protect the FPTP regime as they might for any other challenge to the status quo



Has a move to PR ever been achieved in recent times?

The challenge of moving to PR

I. Barriers to PR: local Labour conflicts

II. Barriers to PR: the wider UK establishment


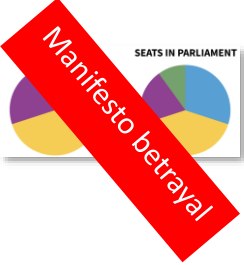


III. Barriers to PR: recent precedents

IV. Final Conclusion



Case studies 1 & 2: failed PR attempts

FPTP turkeys in the UK

<u>Where, when & who</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Motive</u>	<u>What blocked PR?</u>	<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
GE 1997 	Labour promised Libdems to introduce PR if Lab/Lib govt; Labour published its commitment to converting to PR in its 1997 manifesto	Labour was hedging its bets on the expectation that they wouldn't win an outright majority, the price of a coalition with the Libdems was to move to PR	Labour won the largest ever majority in 1997 in which case they did not need to go into coalition with the Libdems. As a result, Blair reneged on their manifesto commitment RE PR	Labour had only courted the PR idea since they feared not managing to achieve a FPTP majority.	
GE 2011 	The Tories agreed to enter a coalition with Libdems in 2010; Libdems traded objection to uni fees for a referendum on electoral reform; however the Tories would only agree to AV, not PR	The Tories understood that AV would be a small change from FPTP if they lost but they could not take the risk of losing a PR referendum since this could destroy them and their power base	Weak pro-PR campaign (Labour MIA) led to crushing defeat (FPTP took 67% of vote). The FPTP camp spent > £7m delivering 40m+ leaflets v £1.5m and 9m leaflets by the AV side. Notable that many of the vote Leave team in 2015 cut their teeth in the AV ref of 2011	A disaster for the pro-PR movement, setting back the initiative for 10 years; a telling insight into how hard the establishment will fight PR...	

Case studies 3 & 4: failed PR attempts

FPTP turkeys in the UK

Where, when & who

Change

Motive

Show-stopper

Conclusion

Outcome

GE 2016



An election pledge made by the Liberals pre-2015 general election to commit to some form of electoral reform

Trudeau believed support for electoral reform was in his party's interest since many voters were frustrated with the shortcomings of FPTP and failure to support a change might affect Liberal's vote share

Trudeau's Liberals secured a majority in the 2015 election. While, he commissioned a review, it concluded (unsurprisingly) there was not sufficient interest in moving to PR and so the commitment was dropped

Like all other instances where electoral reform is promised, it is scuppered by the winning party securing a majority; the lure of single party power consistently seems to outweigh the benefits or PR



GE 2024

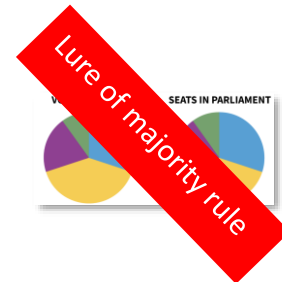


Labour conference votes to adopt PR as policy, with over 2/3s of all unions backing it for the first time too.

It is obvious to all in the Labour movement that FPTP is no longer fit for purpose; only the parliamentary party still retains support for FPTP based on the conflicts outlined above

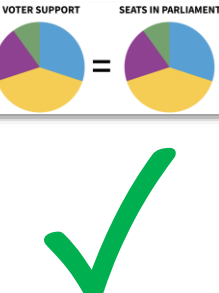
In Nov 2022, Starmer has confirmed that electoral reform will not be in the manifesto since there are too many other priorities. In Apr 2023, he also confirmed that he is a long standing supported of FPTP

Unless there is a coalition with the Libdems, PR will not see the light of day; even if this happens, as long as most Labour MPs oppose, PR cannot be achieved



Case studies 5 & 6: when PR was achieved

FPTP turkeys in the UK

<u>Where</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Motive</u>	<u>Fortunate 'enablers'</u>	<u>Outcome</u>	<u>Conclusion</u>
1996 	Between 1978 and 1996, a series of fortuitous events in New Zealand converted the most extreme FPTP system in the world to a Mixed Member PR system	Between 1946 and 1984, of all 1,146 MPs elected to parliament, only 11 were not Labour and National; As a result, New Zealand had seen some of the most radical neo-lib policies and acute inequality	Between 78 and 96, PR campaign supported and made credible by two Labour PMs; also, a conservative (National) PM also kept his word to hold a PR ref even after a landslide victory in 1990. When the refs came, the highly experienced PR campaign team managed to out-gun the much better funded FPTP campaign	2 PR referendums held, 1 st won by 65% the 2 nd by 53% in 1996; PR set up in 1996 and since only one majority has prevailed. Some improvements RE inequality in the 2010s but no fragmentation of the 2 dominant parties yet	
1999 	Fear of growing Indy movement drew Labour to support and deliver a devolved Scottish Parliament with a Mixed Member PR arrangement, following GE 1997	Labour's primary aim was to 'shore up' their dominance of Scottish politics in the face of an ever more confident Scotland; Labour preferred PR to FPTP since it would forever prevent an outright majority for an Indy party	Labour's huge GE 97 landslide and the sheer momentum built up across civic Scotland drove the re-birth of the Scottish Parliament with a PR system. Labour nor anyone else foresaw that PR could emerge superior to FPTP in terms of achieving social justice, inadvertently arming Scotland with a potential advantage over the wider UK in the longer term	Scotland is now ¼ of a century along its PR journey with great success; when Scotland realises this system is the difference between mainland Europe's quality and life and the UK, the union may face even greater challenges	

The challenge of moving to PR

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- **The UK Labour party remain the only so-called social democratic party in the world that still favours FPTP** – despite the weakness of the progressive voice in the UK since 1980 and the more recent huge support across Labour party members in favour of PR, UK Labour MPs remain unable to overcome the conflicts of interest that would allow them to aspire to levels of social justice we know are possible under other, PR arrangements
- **Recent experience across FPTP countries underlines that turkeys rarely vote for Xmas** – on 2 occasions in the last 25 years, electoral reform manifesto commitments have been dropped following unexpected FPTP landslide victories (Blair 97 & Trudeau 2015). On two further occasions, pro-FPTP MPs have ensured that either PR does not make the manifesto (Lab in 2023) or an ambition to introduce PR is watered down so far to be worthless (AV) before being routed in its ref (2011)
- **PR successes require strong champions, politicians true to their word and quite a bit of luck** - the only instance where PR has been secured from FPTP was New Zealand; this was achieved since 2 NZ Labour party PMs supported it over a 20 year period as well as a National PM honouring his promise to hold a PR ref (very unusual); years of campaigning finally getting them over the line. Scotland's devolved parliament also was given PR but the primary motivation was to face down the rise of the Independence movement.
- **As long as the parliamentary Labour Party supports FPTP there is no hope for a pure PR settlement** – despite some high profile supporters (e.g. Andy Burnham), until there is a majority of Labour (and other progressive) MPs prepared to legislate for PR, it cannot happen

Key takeaway – until all progressive voices are aligned, there is little chance of PR in the UK



If FPTP survives, its more of the same for the UK...

