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## RESULTS

# The British reject the modification of their voting method en masse

An overwhelming majority of the British voted to maintain the first past the post voting method for the election of the Members of the House of Commons during the referendum on 5<sup>th</sup> May. The Lib-Dems led by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg secured the organisation of a popular vote in "exchange" for their participation in the government coalition led by Prime Minister David Cameron (Conservative Party). Two-thirds of the electorate (67.87%) voted "no" to the following question: "At present, the UK uses the 'first past the post' system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the 'alternative vote' system be used instead?" One third (32.09%) voted in favour of changing the voting method. Of the 440 constituencies only 10 voted mostly in support of the alternative vote: Hackney (60.68%), Glasgow Kelvin (58.8%), Haringey (56.62%), Islington (56.92%), Lambeth (54.69%), Cambridge (54.32%), Oxford (54.11%), Southwark (52.73%), Camden (51.40%) and Edinburgh central (51.36%).

Turnout was higher than political analysts had expected and rose to 41.97%. Scotland fulfilled its civic duty most: more than half of the electorate voted in the referendum but the Scots were also called on that day to renew their regional parliament. In London which was not affected by any other local election turnout was the worst. Only 35.4% of the electorate went to vote.

Those who supported the "no" vote in the referendum and notably the Conservatives, finally convinced the British of the merits of the stable, simple first past the post system which enables the constitution of strong majorities and keeps extremist parties in check; they also convinced them that the alternative vote was complicated and that it would not really lead to any real progress.

With this referendum and also via the regional and local elections that took place on the same day Britons seemed to want to punish the Lib-Dems, whom they criticise for having made u-turns on some of their campaign promises and for having supported the austerity policy that is being implemented by the government. As is often the case in a referendum Britons gave their answer rather to those who were asking the question rather than answering the question itself – in this case they targeted the Lib-Dems who were the initiators of this popular consultation.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May the Lib-Dems lost around half of their town councils and many of their regional councillors in Scot-

land where they collapsed. The party's regional leader, Tavish Scott resigned from office after the election. In Liverpool former city council leader (1998-2005), Mike Storey (Lib-Dem), was beaten by Labour Jake Morrison, just 18. The Lib-Dems also suffered a symbolic setback as it lost Sheffield, the stronghold of Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, to Labour.

"It is a terrible blow for those who supported the reform such as myself" declared the Lib-Dem leader when the referendum results were announced. "The result is clear. In democracy when people are asked a question and the answer is as clear as this you have to accept it," he stressed. He promised to learn the lessons of this and step up work and rejected the idea that the Lib-Dems might quit the government coalition. "We have to create jobs. This is the work we have started and that we are going to complete," indicated Nick Clegg. Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron said, "I am quite determined to ensure that this government coalition, which I think beneficial for the

## Referendum on the Voting Method in the UK 5<sup>th</sup> May 2011

country works for the five years of its term in office.” The local elections and the referendum were the first major test for the government coalition since it took office in May 2010. Although the Lib-Dems lost half of its town council seats the Tories won some, notably to the detriment of the Lib-Dems in the south of the country. David Cameron, who actively led the “no” campaign to the referendum is therefore the winner in this election. “The rejection of the alternative vote by the electorate is resoundingly clear,” declared the head of government who stressed that the British “in the name of general interest now wanted the government to continue its work and for it to take care of the problems which the country was facing.” Although the government coalition should not collapse it has however been weakened by the downturn suffered by the Lib-Dems and friction between the two parties may grow more acute. Labour leader Ed Miliband who voted in support of the referendum whilst his own party remained divided over the issue admitted that he was “disappointed” by the results. “The population has clearly spoken and I

accept the verdict,” he indicated. The opposition leader did however say that the electoral system should be improved so that greater participation on the part of the population might be achieved. Labour can however be pleased with the results it achieved in the local elections in which it made slower progress than expected however. Labour declined in Scotland (7 seats less in the Scottish parliament that has 129 in all) where the Scottish National Party (SNP) led by Alex Salmond made a spectacular breakthrough (23 seats more). Iain Gray, Labour’s leader in Scotland, resigned from office after the election. Labour remained stable in Wales where it is due to continue as the region’s leader in the alliance with the Welsh National Party – Plaid Cymru (C) led by Ieuan Wyn Jones. Peter Kellner’s referendum theory – Kellner is an analyst for pollster YouGov, which suggests that the status quo prevails in most popular consultations, has again proven to be true. The result on 5<sup>th</sup> May will mean that electoral reform will disappear from the political agenda for a very long time.

### Result of the referendum on the modification of the voting method on 5th May in the UK.

Turnout: 41.97%

| Question asked  | % of “yes”<br>(The number of votes is<br>in brackets) | Pourcentage de « non »<br>(The number of votes is<br>in brackets) |
|---|---|---|
| <i>“At present, the UK uses the ‘first past the post’ system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the ‘alternative vote’ system be used instead?”</i> | 67.87<br>(6 152 607)                                  | 32,09<br>(13 013 123)   |

Source : BBC

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