

Written evidence submitted by Anonymous [MEL 150]

My Experience of a First Past The Post Democracy

I have 3 points to make:

1. I like my MP, I don't like their party or leader, my choice feels stifled
2. I am very concerned about a future populist government that talks a big game but actually serves interests other than the electorate.
3. I do not want my political oppositions voices erased. Deletion of voters voices is one of the key contributors to the break down of institutional trust plaguing our democracy

I live in a safe seat, Leeds North East. My MP, Fabian Hamilton, is a skilled and time served MP with a long record of working for his community and carrying his portfolio professionally. I don't always agree with him, but I trust him – up to a point. That exact point is where the party whip binds him. I do not like our current Labour government. I feel that while they have made some token gestures towards serving the electorate, they are failing to meet the moment and are too cosy with donors using them for personal gain and who will abandon them should another more pliable party come to power. In part I feel that Labour's large parliamentary majority enables this, but it is also precarious as many constituencies in that majority were carried by marginal votes, which enables them to act with impunity, and without meaningful feedback, until the next general election brings backlash.

At the same time I feel that while the House of Lords has a lot of members who earned their position on merit, a number of appointments have recently called in to question their integrity, and some highly political appointments, coupled with the unaccountable seats held by bishops of the Church of England, amount to a hidden hand in our democracy, frustrating change and giving disproportionate power to unelected interests.

I voted Green at the last election, but living in a safe red seat, I might as well have burned my voting card. First Past the Post effectively deleted my voice. Whilst I disagree with reform voters on almost every issue of substance, I can empathise with their frustration at the lack of representation they received at the last election. The watchdogs of the constitution risk becoming lapdogs to party – or other - allegiance

Minority governments, and even majority governments that hold thin margins in their constituencies, cannot and do not represent all of the people, they only represent some of them. In an ideal world all politicians would work for all the voters, but we do not live in that world. It is this discrepancy that feeds mistrust in institutions and makes politics feel like a losing game to many ordinary people. The threats and violence experienced by MP's is symptomatic of that mistrust and frustration.

Similarly, in the Mother Of All Parliaments, the winning party would normally be in constant discussion with the opposition and minority parties, however this expectation is not binding, something we found out to our detriment during the last years of the recent conservative government, who often used their majority to ignore the opposition on issues of substance. Again, the issue of voter voice deletion is manifested through disregard for the opposition party.

We desperately need Proportional Representation and reform of the House of Lords into an elected body.

By having a more proportional representation, nobody gets left out, everybody gets someone they voted for and everybody gets someone they are happy to write to to get their voice heard. Alliances can become more fluid and leaders must consider more representatives in their calculations before putting bills to a vote. PR would bind the hands of a would-be autocrat and force him to horse trade with more moderate, rational voices, instead of whipping a ruling party into compliance. PR would ensure that every bill passed by vote has been passed in accordance with a majority of voters, not just a majority of a minority party in government.

We cannot leave this to a referendum. If first past the post is incapable of delivering change, then there is no sense in denying it's replacement just because it can't pass the same flawed system. We the electorate delegate our power to MP's to take the decisions we, as an electorate, are not capable of making for ourselves, and this is one of those cases. We already know that referenda are incapable of reforming the system, only delivering on populist bad ideas presented by the existing establishment First Past The Post protects. We need MP's to bite the bullet, abandon the idea of gambling the next election on a winner-takes-all basis, and to deliver the change we need. Soon. Lest we face similar struggles to our American cousins.

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