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# **ELECTORAL REFORM AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

A red line issue in 2015

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# MAKING LOCAL DEMOCRACY WORK

## **What is the Single Transferable Vote?**

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a form of proportional representation which uses preferential voting in multi-member constituencies. Each voter gets one vote, which can transfer from their first preference to their second preference and so on. If your preferred candidate has no chance of being elected or has enough votes already, your vote is transferred to another candidate in accordance with your instructions.

STV ensures that very few votes are wasted, unlike other systems, especially First Past the Post, where only a small number of votes actually contribute to the result.

## **Why should we fight for STV at the local level?**

Since its introduction in Scotland in 2007, local electoral reform has transformed the quality of local democracy, ending the scourge of uncontested seats and one-party states and giving Scottish voters fairer representation. It's time voters in England and Wales are given the same democratic opportunities that their Scottish counterparts enjoy.

- **Uncontested seats** In 2011 there were 24 local authorities that saw at least 10% of their seats go uncontested. In Wales in 2012 there were 96 uncontested seats. In the last Scottish election conducted under First Past the Post (in 2003) there were 61 uncontested seats. But since 2007 when STV was introduced, there have been candidates contesting every single seat.
- **One-party states** Over 20 million people in England and Wales are living in local authorities where one party holds over 75% of the seats. One-party states can breed complacency and neglect in the ruling party, leaving people effectively unrepresented and the local authority unscrutinised.



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# THE LIB DEM CASE FOR LOCAL PR

## An opportunity in 2015

In Scotland a quiet revolution is under way thanks to the introduction of STV in 2007. This radical and far-reaching reform took place largely because the Scottish Liberal Democrats made it a red line issue in their manifesto.

After the disappointment of the AV referendum, Lib Dems once again have the chance to make democracy fairer. With the difficulty both Labour and the Conservatives face in gaining an overall majority, and Lib Dem support holding up in key seats, a hung parliament in 2015 looks likely. And thanks to a concerted campaign by the Electoral Reform Society (see overleaf), both Labour and Conservatives are amenable to the idea of local electoral reform.

If the Lib Dems make local electoral reform a red line issue in 2015, just as they did in Scotland, we could see the same result: a fairer electoral system that strengthens local democracy.

## HOW LIB DEMS WOULD FARE IN SEVEN COUNCILS

COUNCIL	VOTES (LAST ELECTION)	SEATS NOW	SEATS UNDER PR*
Bolton	12.2%	3	7
Bournemouth	17.1%	3	9
East Hampshire	28.4%	5	12
Havant	12.8%	1	5
Hertsmere	10.3%	0	4
Lichfield	10.1%	0	5
Manchester	14.7%	9	14

\*Calculated according to vote share at the last election against total seats

# OUR CAMPAIGN SO FAR

## **Towards One Nation: the Labour case for local electoral reform**

Labour has always contained a strand of reforming zeal despite its tortuous relationship with electoral reform. But to fulfil its claim to represent One Nation, the party has to do something about its ‘electoral deserts’ – particularly in the south of England. *Towards One Nation* argues that local PR would put Labour on the map across the country. STV in Scotland, far from undermining Labour as many believe, has actually put the party into more administrations than under First Past the Post.

## **Northern Blues: the Conservative case for local electoral reform**

The Conservatives are being wiped out in the north, making their ambitions for a Westminster majority harder and harder to achieve. Yet there are many thousands of people who vote Conservative in northern areas, and they simply don’t get the representation they deserve. Local PR would translate this vote into councillors, which could in turn provide the party with the activist base it needs. Our report, *Northern Blues*, has persuaded influential Conservatives to abandon the party’s traditional hostility towards electoral reform and embrace local PR as a viable goal.

## **Rotten Boroughs: there’s something wrong with local democracy**

Our Rotten Boroughs campaign gives voice to citizens who live in council areas which are one-party states, where there is little (or no) effective scrutiny or where some voters don’t get the representation they deserve. First Past the Post is failing millions of people in England and Wales. Rotten Boroughs is the Electoral Reform Society’s campaign to expose it. Read or share your story at [www.electoral-reform.org.uk/rottenboroughs](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/rottenboroughs)

**You can read all our reports at [www.electoral-reform.org.uk/publications](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/publications)**

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