

The Alternative Vote: a benign electoral reform for the UK

Political Studies Association

Breakfast briefing

March 29 2011

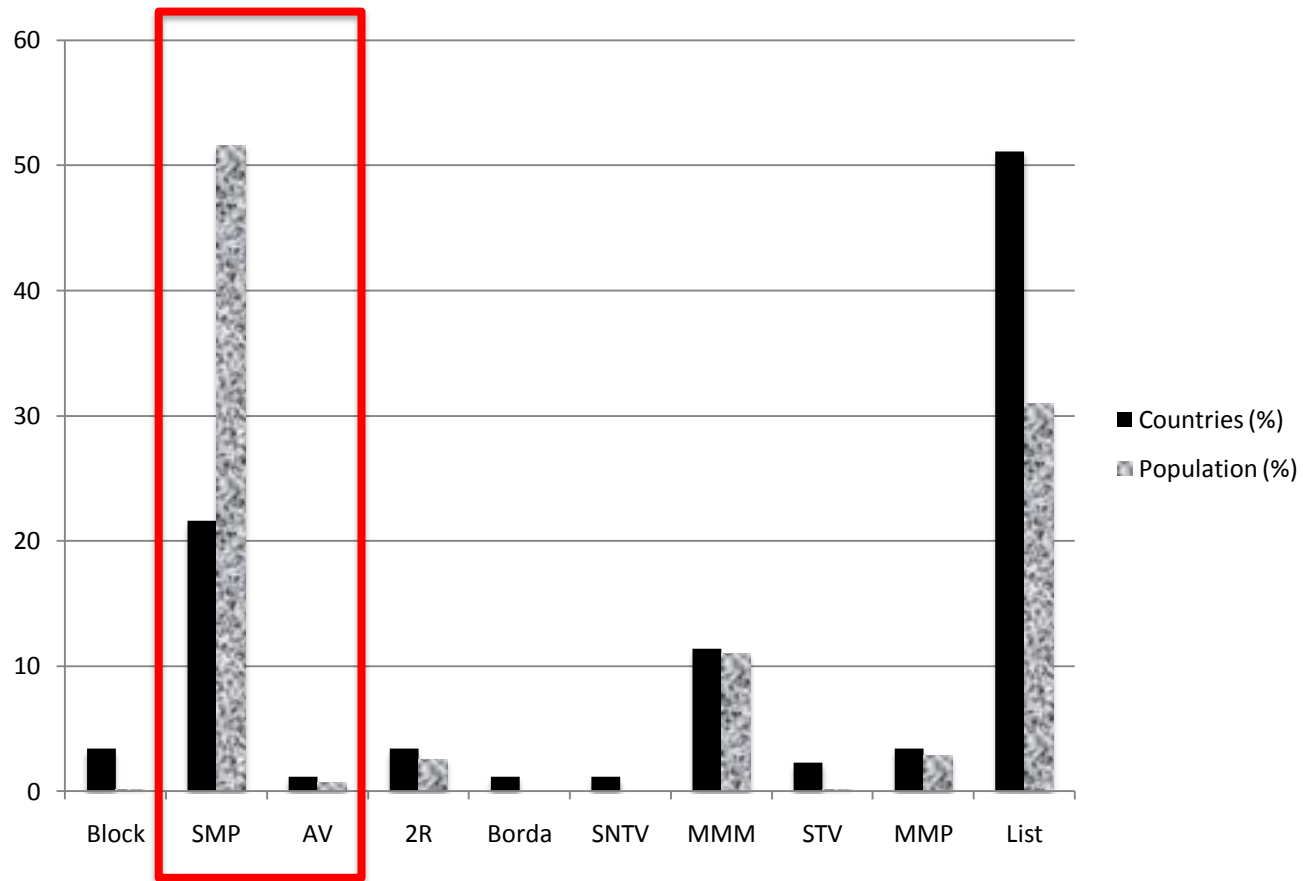


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Three points

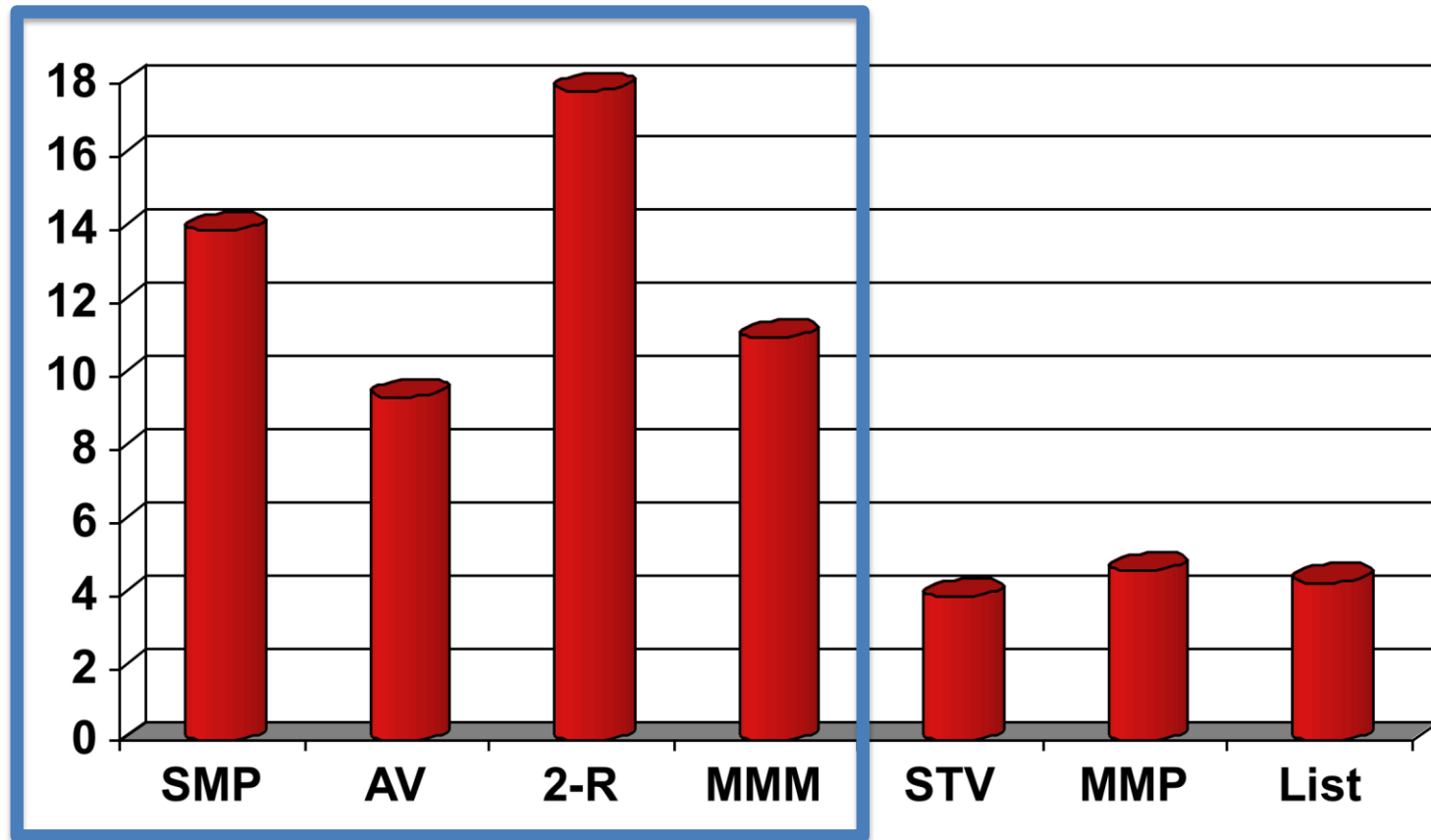
1. AV – little used and not a major reform
2. The Australian experience: greater use of preferences overtime, but little if any affect on election outcome
3. Overall, this would be a benign reform; but its defeat would be a serious set back.

1. AV – a rarely used electoral system



David Farrell, *Electoral Systems*. (second edition) Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

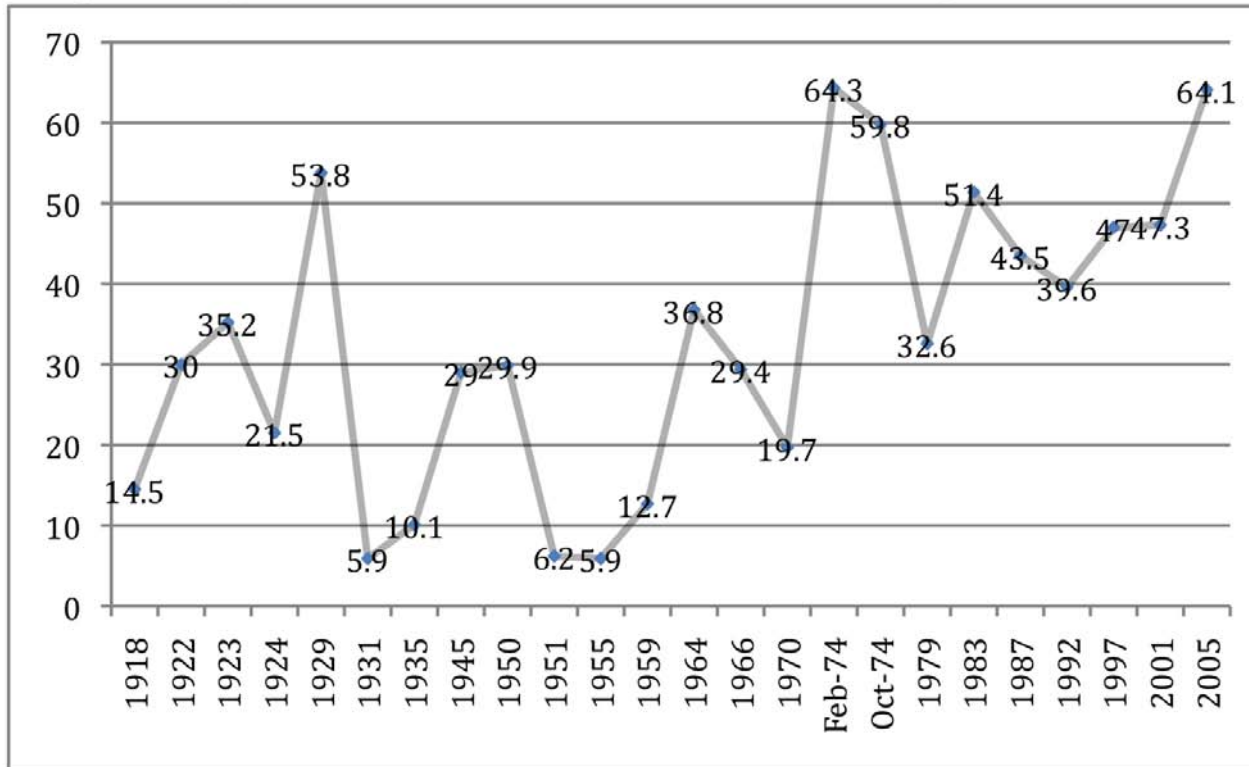
AV – another non-proportional electoral system



David Farrell, *Electoral Systems*. (second edition) Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

One thing that AV would change

The percentage of British MPs elected with less than 50 percent of the vote



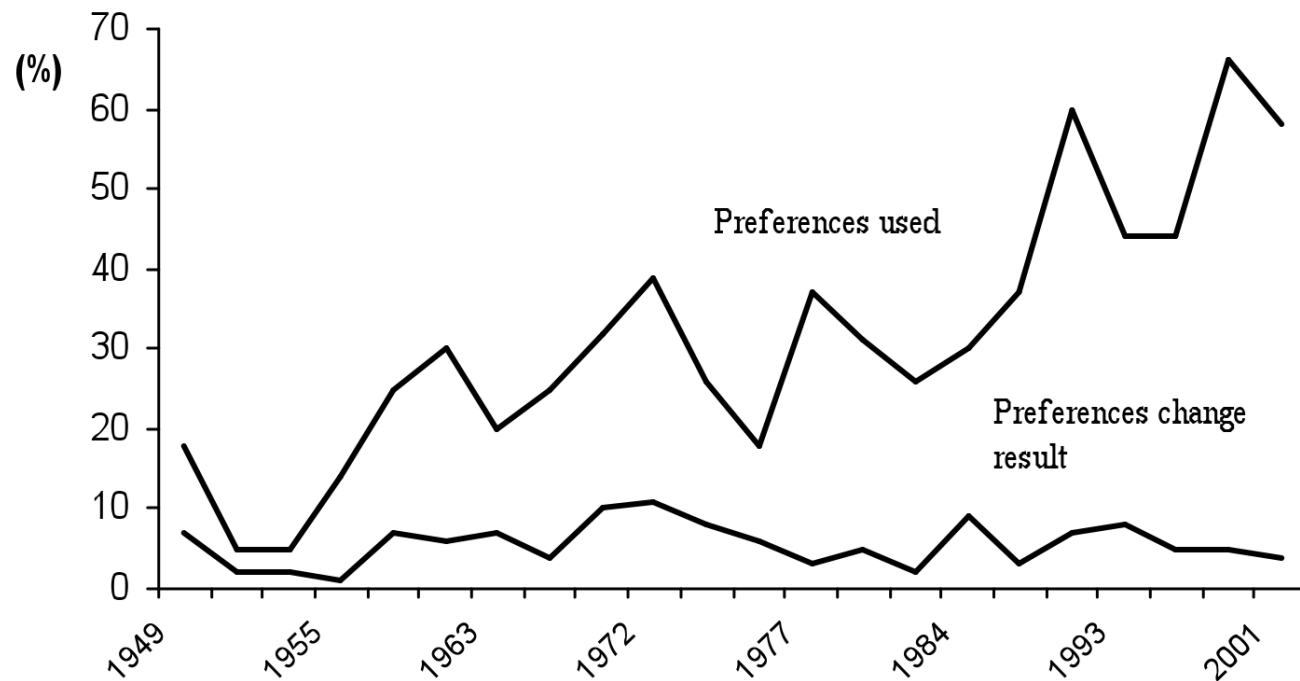
David Farrell, *Electoral Systems*. (second edition) Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011

2. The Australian experience

Number of Counts Before Winner Declared and Effective Number of Electoral Parties, House of Representatives Elections, 1983–2001

	1983	1984	1987	1990	1993	1996	1998	2001
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<i>Effective number of electoral parties (N_e)</i>	2.67	2.77	2.90	3.37	2.91	3.21	3.46	3.42
<i>Number of counts (%)</i>								
1	73.6	69.6	63.2	39.9	56.5	56.1	33.8	42.0
2	7.2	5.4	8.1	12.8	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.7
3	10.4	12.8	15.6	12.1	4.7	3.4	3.4	5.3
4	7.2	8.1	10.2	12.8	7.4	7.4	5.4	13.3
5	0.8	3.3	2.7	9.4	6.1	12.2	18.2	10.7
6	0.8	0.7		6.0	6.1	7.4	12.8	8.7
7				5.4	9.5	4.1	10.8	8.7
8				1.3	3.4	4.1	4.7	3.3
9					2.0	3.4	4.7	2.0
10					2.0		3.4	2.0
11							0.7	1.3

Proportion of Seats Affected by the Distribution of Preferences, House of Representatives Elections, 1949–2001



3. A benign electoral reform

- There's 'no harm' in making this change
- It will give MPs greater electoral legitimacy without any wider collateral damage to British politics
- It could be an important stepping stone towards real electoral reform