# Proportional Representation for the UK Parliament

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This paper sets out a simple scheme for proportional representation for the UK Parliament that could be implemented very quickly.

It uses the Single Transferable Vote (STV) within constituencies based on local authority areas, mostly electing 3 to 6 MPs. This gives a high level of proportionality, while maintaining a strong local connection. It has all the well-known advantages of STV, including maximising voter choice, minimising wasted votes and giving fair representation to smaller parties and independent candidates.

The scheme is perhaps best appreciated on a map showing the proposed constituencies which, with a full schedule giving current (2019/20) electorates and seat numbers, is available at lder.org/stv .

## Details

For simplicity, this scheme keeps the existing numbers of MPs from each of the UK's four nations, with overall total 650, only changing the way in which they are elected. Constituencies are based entirely on Local Authority (LA) boundaries, electing mostly 3 to 5 MPs in rural areas and 4 to 6 in urban areas, with a few exceptions dictated by electoral numbers and geography[1]. Once boundaries have been chosen, and a target quota of electors per seat fixed, the entitlement of each constituency can be calculated; this is then rounded up or down to a whole number, with the cutoff chosen to minimise the proportional discrepancy between entitlement and allocation[2]. The target quota is chosen so as to give the desired overall total of seats (533, 59, 40, 18 for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively).

Some typical constitutencies, with numbers of seats in brackets, are as follows: Bristol (4), Liverpool (4), Glasgow (6), Falkirk & West Lothian (4), Cornwall & Scilly (6), Lewisham & Greenwich (5), Yorkshire East (East Riding and Hull) (6), Bedford and Milton Keynes (4), West Glamorgan (Swansea and Neath Port Talbot) (5), Northern Ireland West (Fermanagh and Omagh, Derry and Strabane, and Mid Ulster) (4). Only one LA, Birmingham with an entitlement of 10 seats, has to be split. Almost all the amalgamations fit with traditional county boundaries; only three cross county council boundaries.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the rule of not dividing LAs, so that for example a constituency with entitlement 3.51 gets rounded up to an allocation of 4 seats, the overall variability of electors per seat, $\pm 6\%$, is less than that of the current FPTP system, which was 7% when it was introduced in 2007 and has since drifted out to nearly 10%. In contrast, the variability of the STV system does not drift over time, because it can be updated very easily each year, adjusting the number of seats in a constituency rather than changing boundaries; data for England 2003-19 show that none of the proposed boundaries would have had to be changed over that period, with the single exception of Leeds, whose entitlement has varied between 7 and 8; about a quarter of constituencies would have seen their entitlement go up or down during the period. This stability in constituency boundaries, and their close fit to the structure of local government, are major additional attractions to both voters and representatives, quite apart from the basic motives of fairness, voter choice and proportionality underlying the scheme.

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[1] These are the protected island seats of the northern and western isles each with 1 MP and the Isle of Wight with 2, plus two extensive rural LAs, Powys and Dumfries & Galloway, for which there is not a natural partner, with 2; also three urban areas, Leeds, Teesside and NE London, with 7 seats.

[2] Thus if the entitlement of a constituency $e$ is between $n$ and $n+1$, it is allocated $n$ seats if $e/n < (n+1)/e$, but $n+1$ otherwise. This is the cutoff formula used in the US when allocating congressional seats among states. A cap was also intended in line with the Venice Convention, preventing 'under-representation of more than 15%', *i.e.* $e/n > 1.15$; but this turned out not to be needed in the present case.