# WHY FPTP IS MAKING US MISERABLE

If you've ever voted in a UK general election and felt unsatisfied no matter who won, you're not alone. In a country with more political parties than ever, the UK still clings to a two-party system, thanks to First Past the Post (FPTP). And it's making everyone miserable.

What Is FPTP, and Why Is It a Problem?

First Past the Post (FPTP) is a majoritarian voting system in which the candidate with the most votes in each constituency (area) wins, even if most people in total voted for someone else.

This voting system made sense at a time when UK politics fit neatly into two boxes: Labour on the left, Conservatives on the right. But today, with the rise of smaller parties, the political landscape is far more crowded, giving voters more choice in who they would like to support, based on individual issues such as the environment or immigration.

As a result, smaller parties are gaining more influence and support, however, they are still unable to win the overall majority needed in a general election on their own, without a coalition like in 2010. This is because under FPTP, only the party that comes first in each constituency gets a seat, so smaller parties can win millions of votes nationally but still end up with almost no representation. So, you could vote Green, Lib Dem or anyone else, but chances are, your MP will still be wearing a red or blue rosette.

2024 UK General Election: Vote Share vs Seat Share by Party
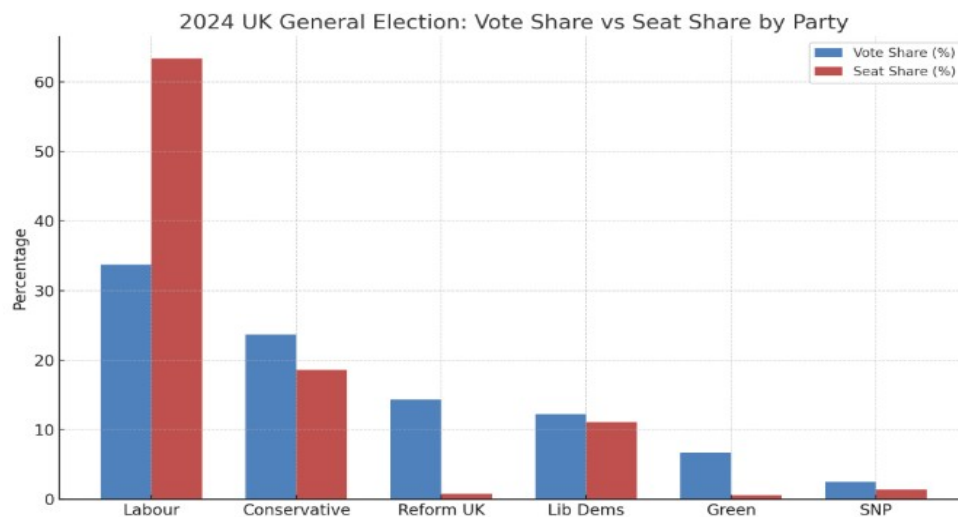
Figures from the 2024 general election. Reform UK and the Green Party received a significant share of the national vote but secured a disproportionately small number of seats in Parliament. Meanwhile, Labour secured a majority of seats with just over a third of the vote.

The Great Centrist Convergence
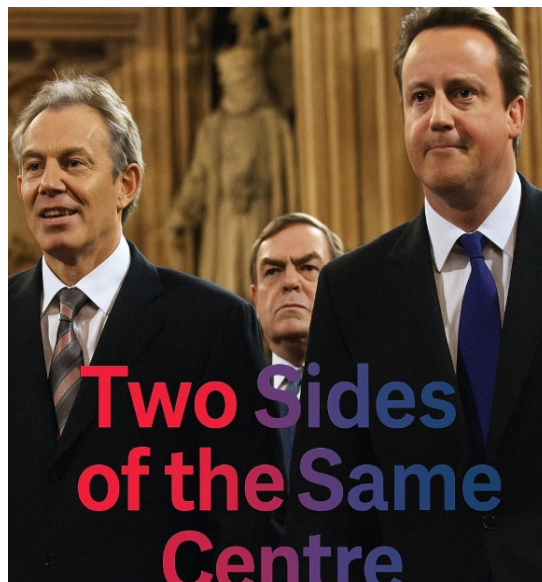
Tony Blair's 'New Labour' in the 1990s, saw the Labour party moving away from its traditional socialist policies and shifting to the centre to appeal to middle-class voters, which led to their 1997 landslide victory. Similarly, the 2000s saw the Conservatives, particularly under David Cameron, shift away from its strict Thatcherism, to a more centrist approach, which led to their coalition victory in 2010.

These shifts were tactical, helping both parties appeal to a broader base, and win. However, moving to the centre has blurred the identities of both parties, leaving them as watered down versions of themselves, that are angering one side of the voters and not particularly pleasing the other side, leaving left-wing and right-wing voters frustrated.

Tactical Voting: Safety Net or Democratic Failure?

We don't vote for something, we vote against something
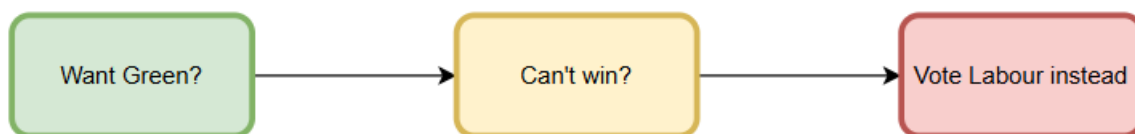
So, how have Labour and the Conservatives managed to remain in power?
Due to FPTP's majoritarian nature, it favours large parties like the Conservatives or Labour, and leaves little room for anyone else. Knowing this, many people decide to vote tactically for either the two parties, not because they truly support them, but just to block the other side from winning. In the end, we don't vote for something, we vote against something. That's not how democracy should work. This cycle keeps the two main parties dominant, but also keeps voters cynical and disengaged, leading to an increasingly low voter turnout in elections.

But... Is FPTP the Lesser Evil?

As it favours large parties, it keeps out extremist parties, so no far-left or far-right party is likely to gain power and do anything drastic. By switching to a different voting system, there is a chance of an extremist party getting into power and causing major uproar. If an extremist party were to win, sure, it might be democratic — but is it wise? So, maybe FPTP doesn't make us happy, but maybe that's the point. The alternative might be worse: one side ecstatic, the other side horrified, like we are seeing in the increasingly polarised US. FPTP is a gloomy kind of stability. It's a system that doesn't excite anyone, but doesn't terrify anyone either.

So What Now?

So, it's no secret that FPTP is not accurately representing our political landscape in elections, and maybe it's making us all mildly miserable, but is that the price of keeping politics stable? Or shouldn't democracy give us something better than being 'less unhappy'? We deserve a system that lets us vote for who we want, not against who we don't want. Until then, we'll keep picking the least-worst option and wondering why nothing ever really changes.