



# The UK Party System and Party Politics

## Part 1: The electoral dimension

**Patrick Dunleavy**

Gv 311: British Politics course, Lecture 9  
Michaelmas Term 2014-15

# A 'party system' is constituted by

- a. How voters behave
- b. Electoral institution effects, favouring one or more parties over others
- c. Party ideologies and cleavages
- d. Governance institutions favouring some parties
- e. How parties recruit elites and how they behave in office and opposition
- f. How much parties shape public policies

# This week I cover

1. Duverger's Law, and how it completely ceased to apply in the UK
2. Current trends and characterizing the GB party system now
3. The role of disproportionality (measured as DV scores) in sustaining major party dominance at general elections
4. Tracking party system expansion with the effective number of parties (ENP)

# Duverger's Law

- Plurality rule ('first past the post') elections always produce/ tend to encourage the emergence of a two-party system.  
Formulated in 1955 at height of post-war re-growth period.
- Initially framed at national level, but that pattern soon collapsed
- Then re-framed to apply only *within* local electoral districts (constituencies)
- Supplementary Duverger's Hypothesis – proportional systems encourage more parties to emerge and survive

# 'Mechanical' and 'psychological' mechanisms in Duverger's Law

**Table 1.** The mechanical and psychological impacts of plurality rule elections on party competition, according to Duverger.

Impacts from plurality rule elections	Major party elites	Potential counter-elites	Voters
Mechanical effect - after election 1	Major parties are disproportionately rewarded with seats, given their vote shares	Smaller parties are radically under-represented in the legislature, given their vote shares - winning no or few seats	Votes cast for smaller parties are recognized by voters as ineffective, failing to convert into representation
Psychological effect in the election run-up period -prior to the start of election 2	Dissenting sub-leaders remain inside the ranks of major parties, fearing that breakaway parties would be electoral suicide	Counter-elites fear that efforts to start-up new parties or back existing smaller parties will fail – so candidates and finance are hard for such parties to attract. Hence smaller parties stand few (effective or competitive) candidates.	Voters fear that smaller parties are going to be ineffective. Voters fail to express support for these parties in opinion polls, by- elections, or 'secondary' elections
Prediction A	The number of parties standing candidates in each local electoral district is small (perhaps just 2)		
Psychological effect during the campaign period for election 2	Not applicable	Not applicable	Voters fear that smaller parties present on the ballot are going to be ineffective, and so fail to vote for them
Prediction B	The Number of observable parties $N_{(op)}$ is small, with little support for third and subsequent parties. (Hence $ENP_{votes}$ is automatically low, close to or below 2).		
Mechanical effect - after election 2	As before	As before	As before

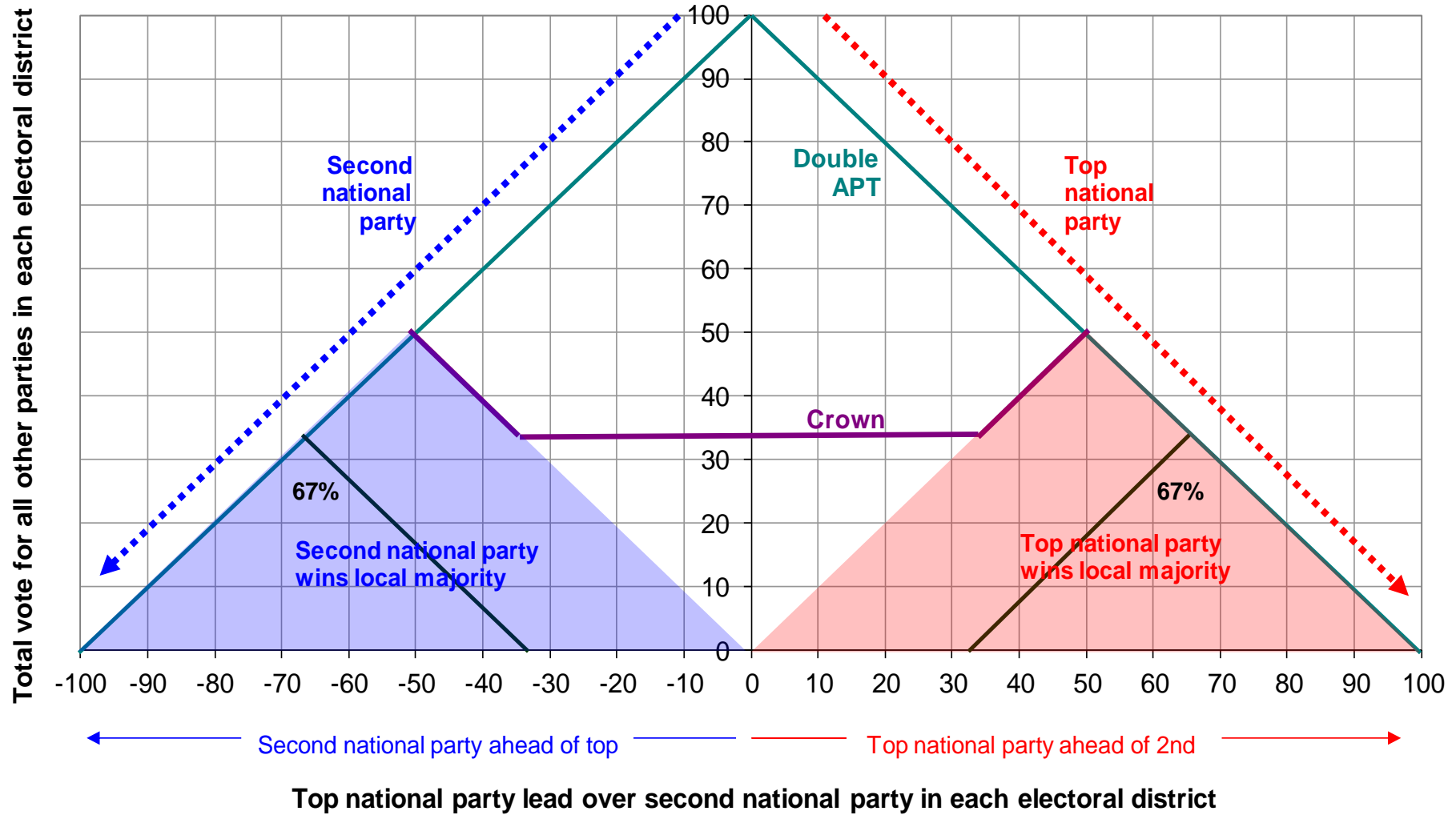
# Duverger's Law updated

- Andrew Cox's 1997 reformulation says –  
for any electoral system the maximum  
number of parties per district  $N = M + 1$   
(where  $M$  is district magnitude).
- In plurality rule,  $M$  size = 1, so UK maximum  
number of (effective or major?) parties per  
constituency should = 2
- Nationalization of parties is a separate issue  
driven by regional identities etc – so Cox's  
theoretical max  $N$  for UK could be  $646 \times 2 =$   
1292. A pretty safe bet here!

## Dickson and Scheve (partial) counter-theory

- Under plurality rule, a social group with 67%+ support in a constituency can split two ways, knowing they will still *always* beat the opposition
- Splitting majority vote is rational in maximizing the welfare of the majority of the majority – MP closer to their view
- Implies – we should never see a top party  $P_1 > 67\%$
- If opposition also splits, the majority social group may fragment further, yet still win

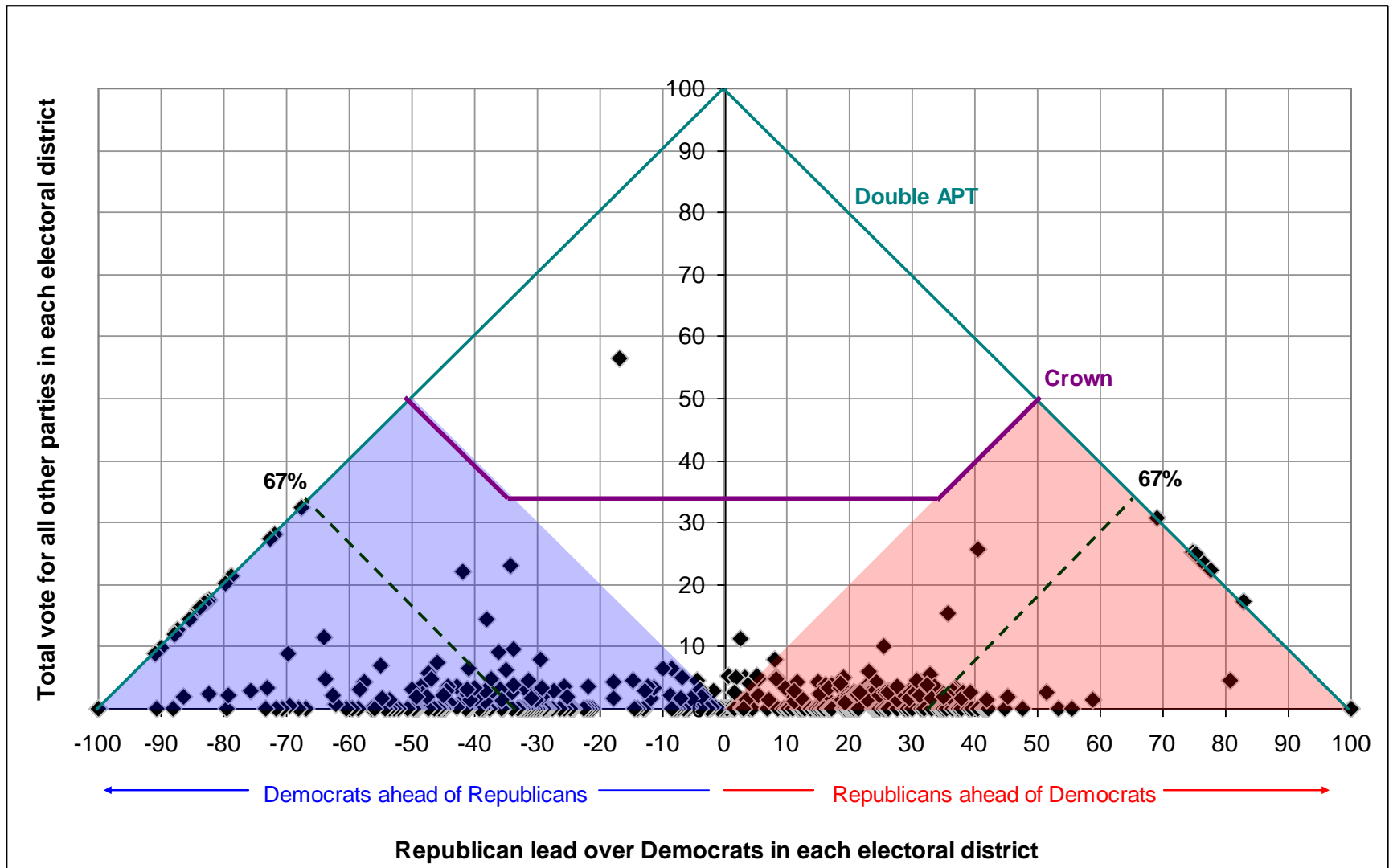
# The Crown diagram



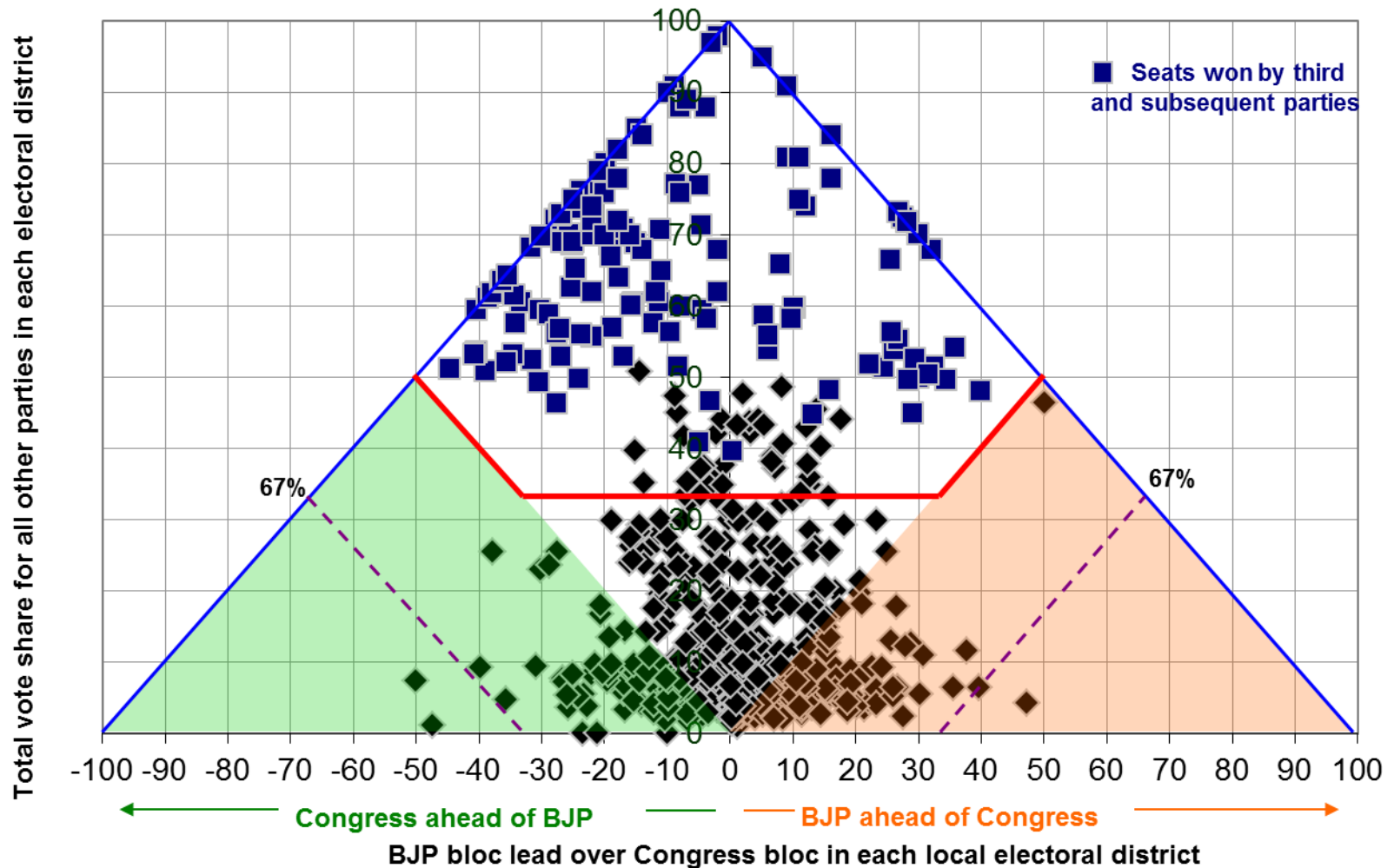


# USA House of Representatives district-level outcomes 2006 election

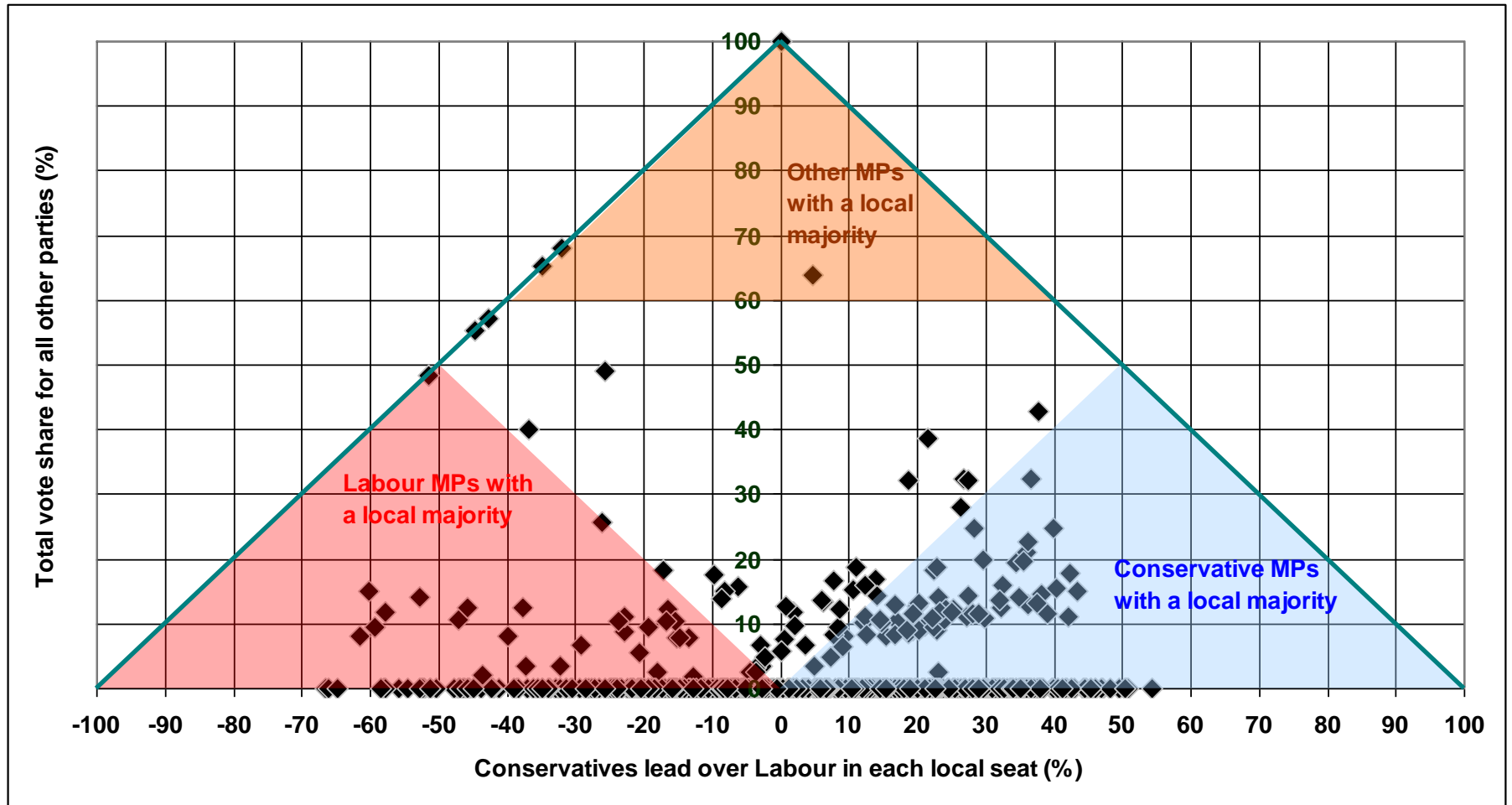
- USA is almost the only modern super-Duvergerian two-party system



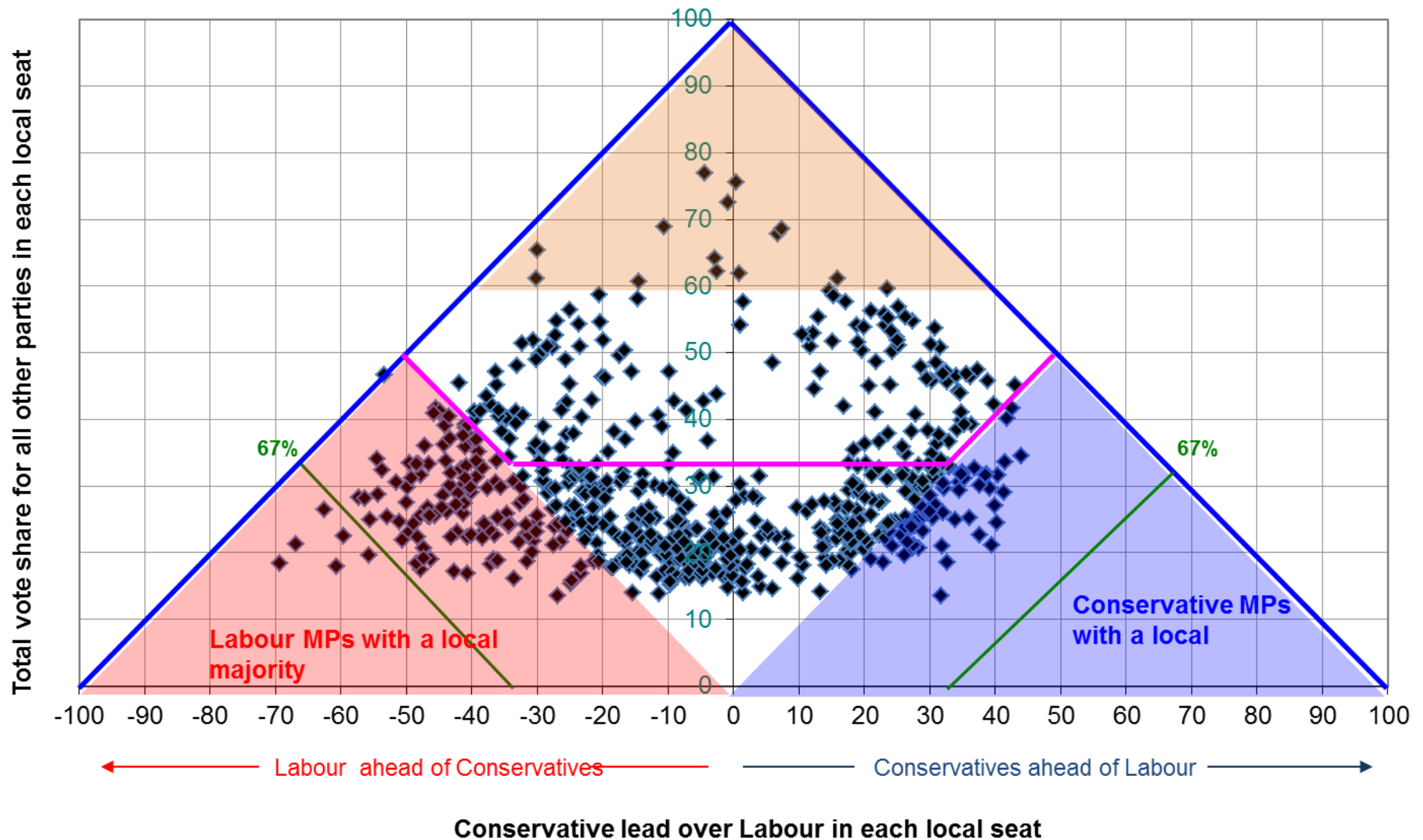
**A non-Duvergerian pattern – the Indian district-level outcomes in the 2004 general election. 43 parties in Lok Sabha, 18 in coalition government**



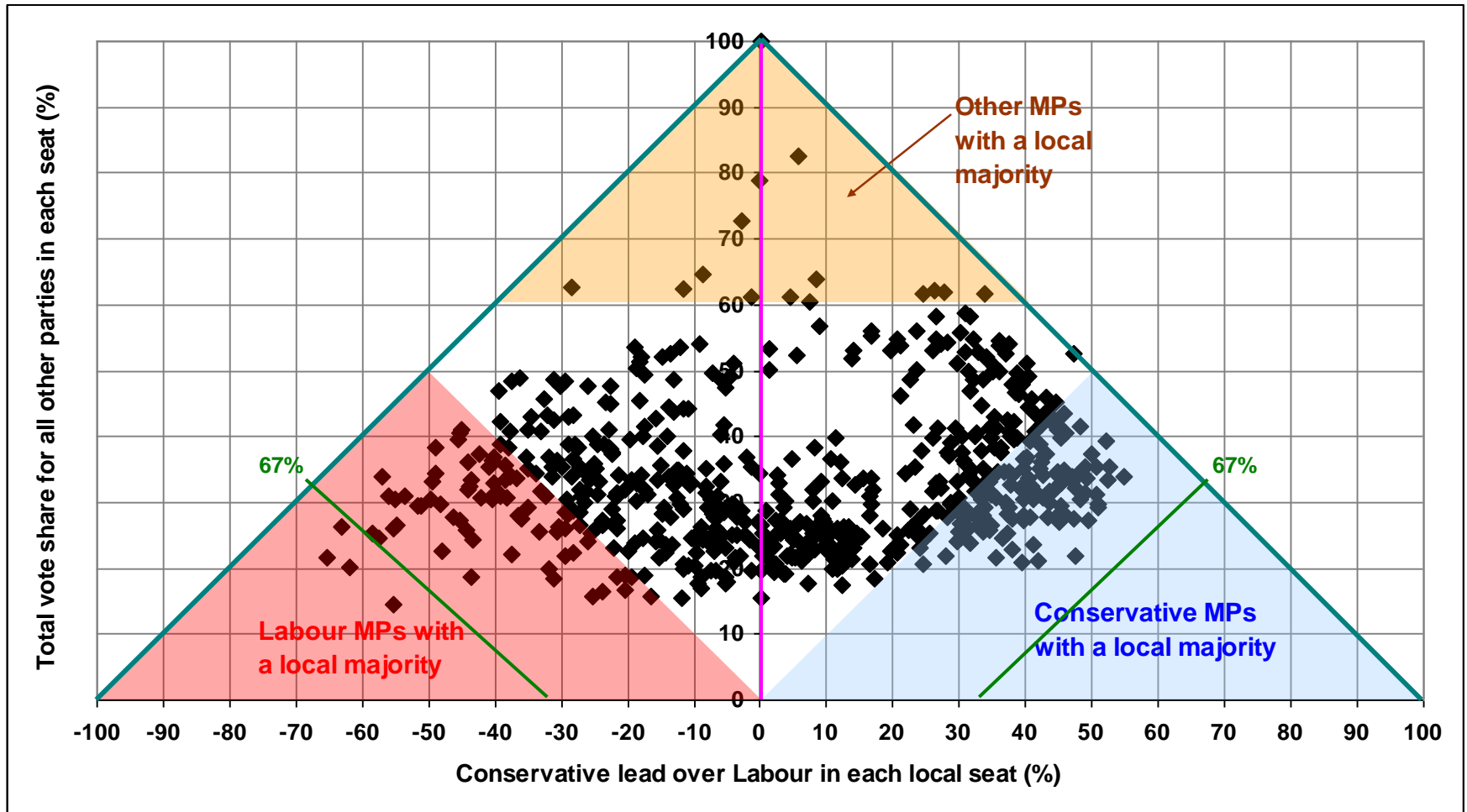
# Constituency outcomes in the 1955 general election, in Great Britain - then a predominantly two-party system



# Constituency outcomes in the 2005 general election, Great Britain

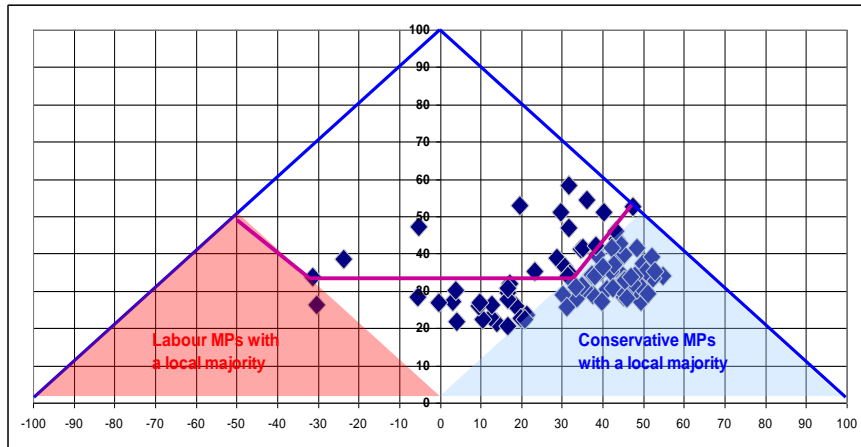


# Constituency outcomes in the 2010 general election, in Great Britain

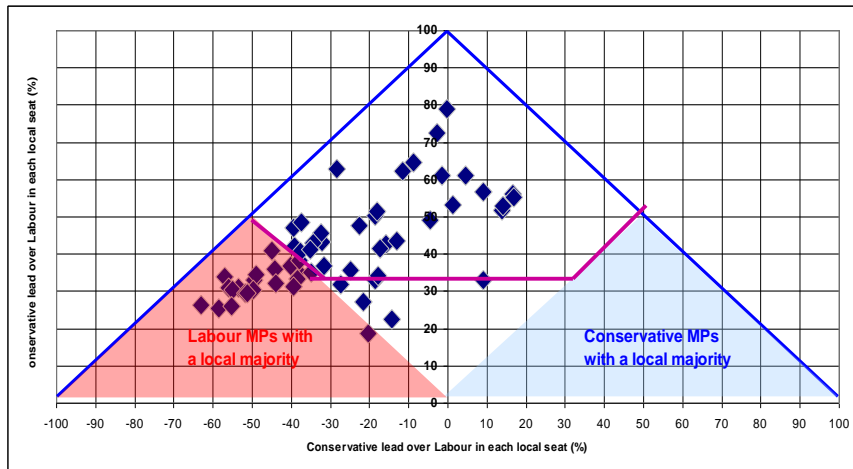
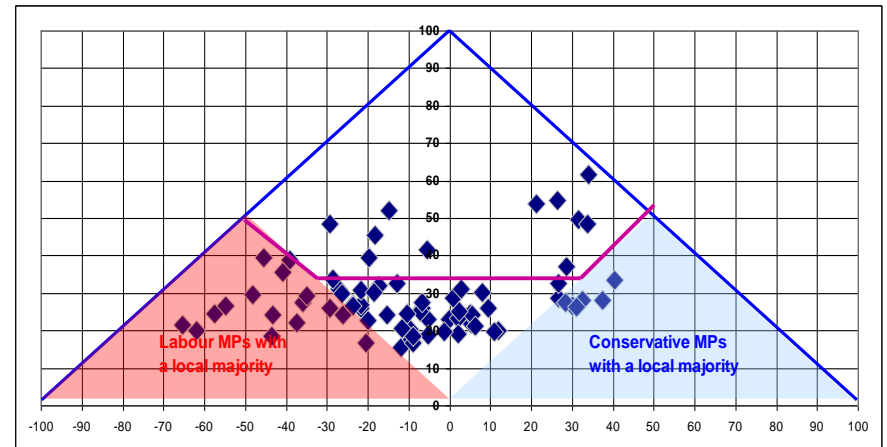


# The patterns of constituency outcomes across four different regions in the 2010 general election

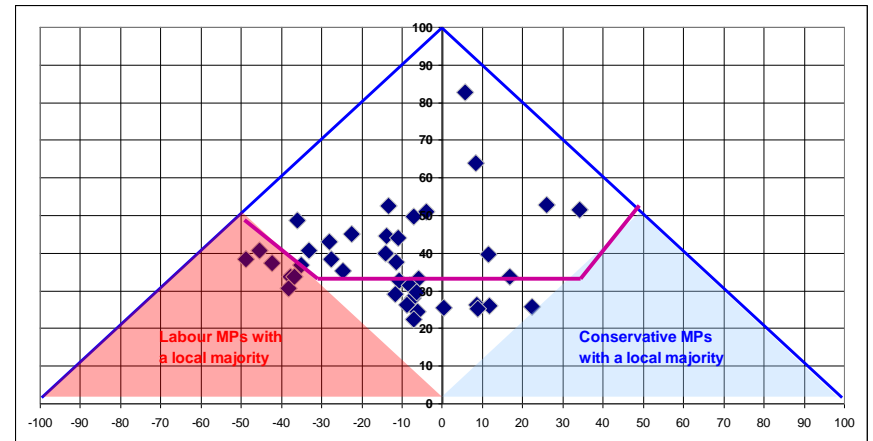
South-east



North-west



Scotland



Wales

## Comparing with other countries

Election districts with a given number of parties receiving 1% or more of local votes	United States, House of Representatives 2006	Indian general election 2004	Great Britain, general election 2005
One	7.8	0	0
Two	52.6	3.9	0
Three	29.0	13.8	3.5
Four	9.2	23.4	32.3
Five	0.7	26.7	41.1
Six	0.2	18.4	17.5
Seven	0.2	8.6	4.9
Eight	0.2	3.1	0.6
Nine or more	0	2.0	0
Total	100%	100%	100%
No of cases	435	546	628

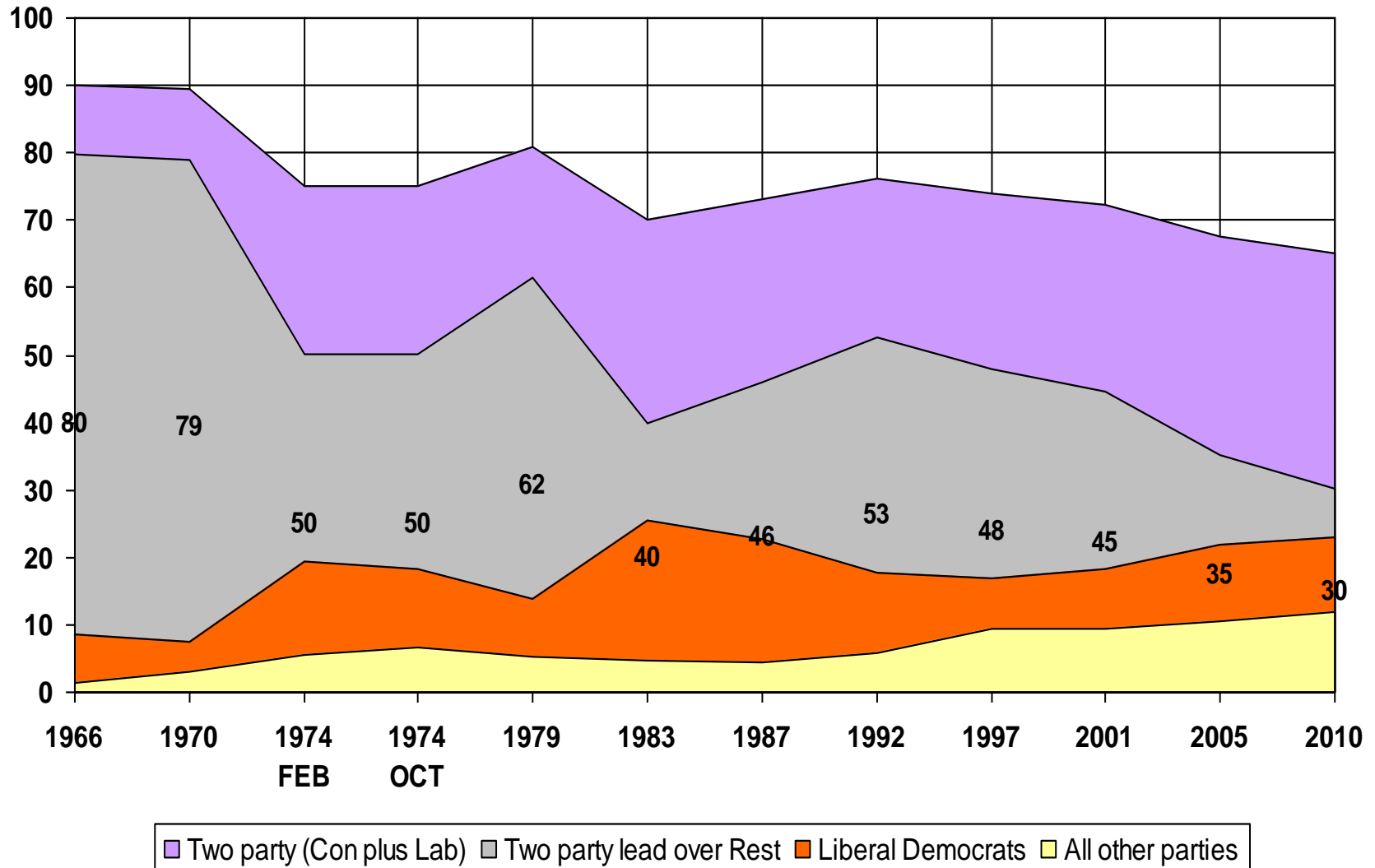
Rows consistent with Duverger's Law

# The UK party system now

1. GB has not been a 'two-party system' since 1974  
- nor a 2.5 or 3 party system since 2000
2. In terms of voting Great Britain is a standard  
European multi-party system
3. Voters' multi-partism has previously been  
artificially suppressed by plurality rule voting at  
general elections

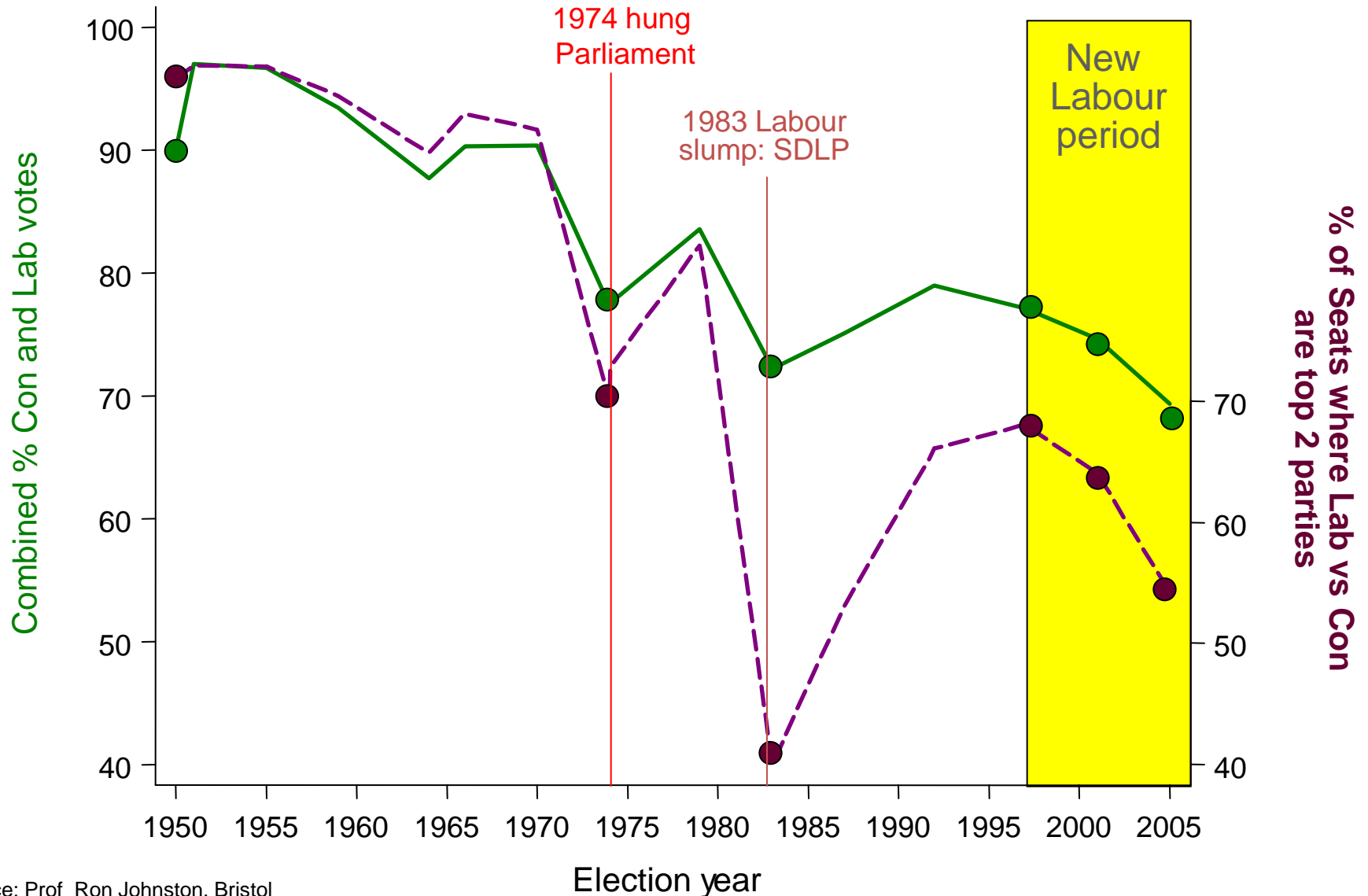


# Trends in the vote shares for the top two parties and for smaller parties, 1970 to 2010



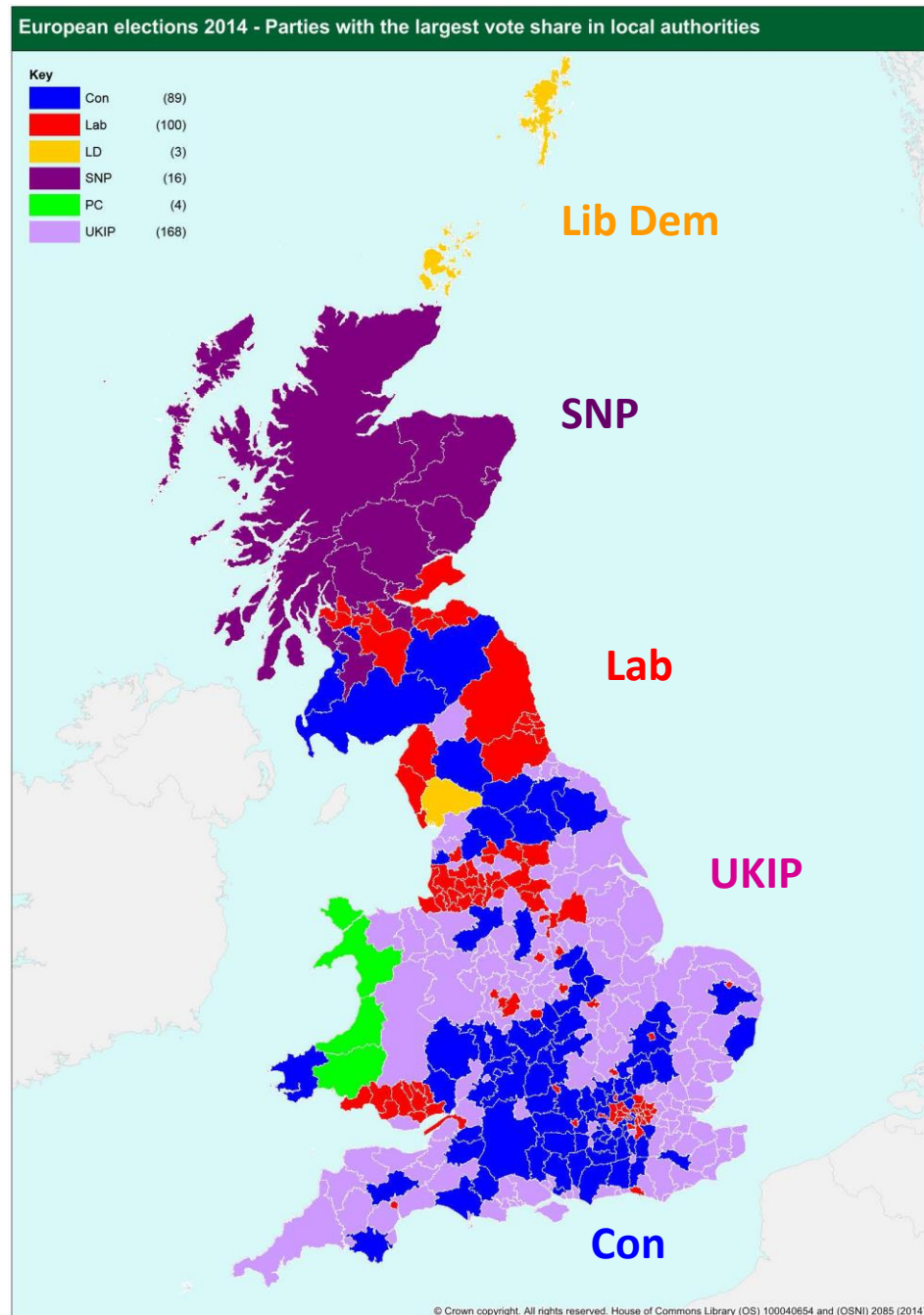
Note: The numbers in grey area here show the combined Conservative and Labour per cent support, minus the combined support for the Liberal Democrats and all other parties, that is the 'two party lead over the Rest'.

# The decline of the Labour and Conservatives two party system at general elections since 1950



## Party running top in 2014 Euro election votes, by local authority areas

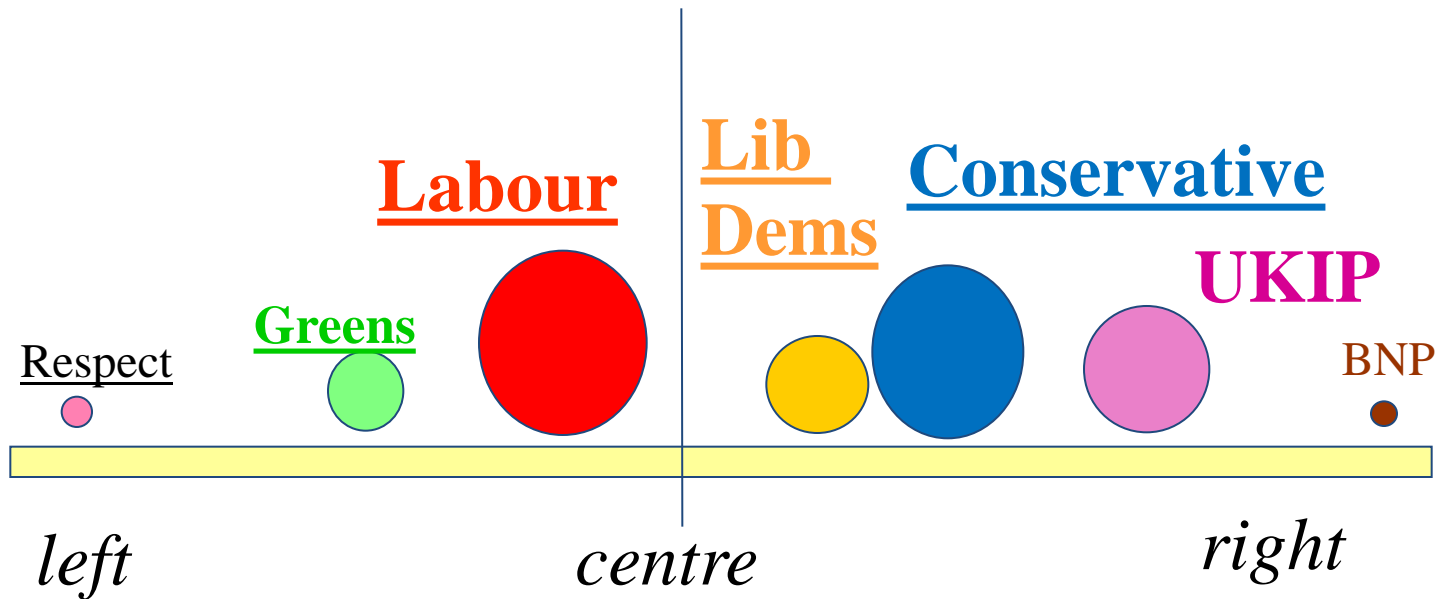
Source: House of Commons Library,  
European Parliament Elections 2014,  
Research Paper 14/32, 11 June 2014.  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/RP14-32/european-parliament-elections-2014>



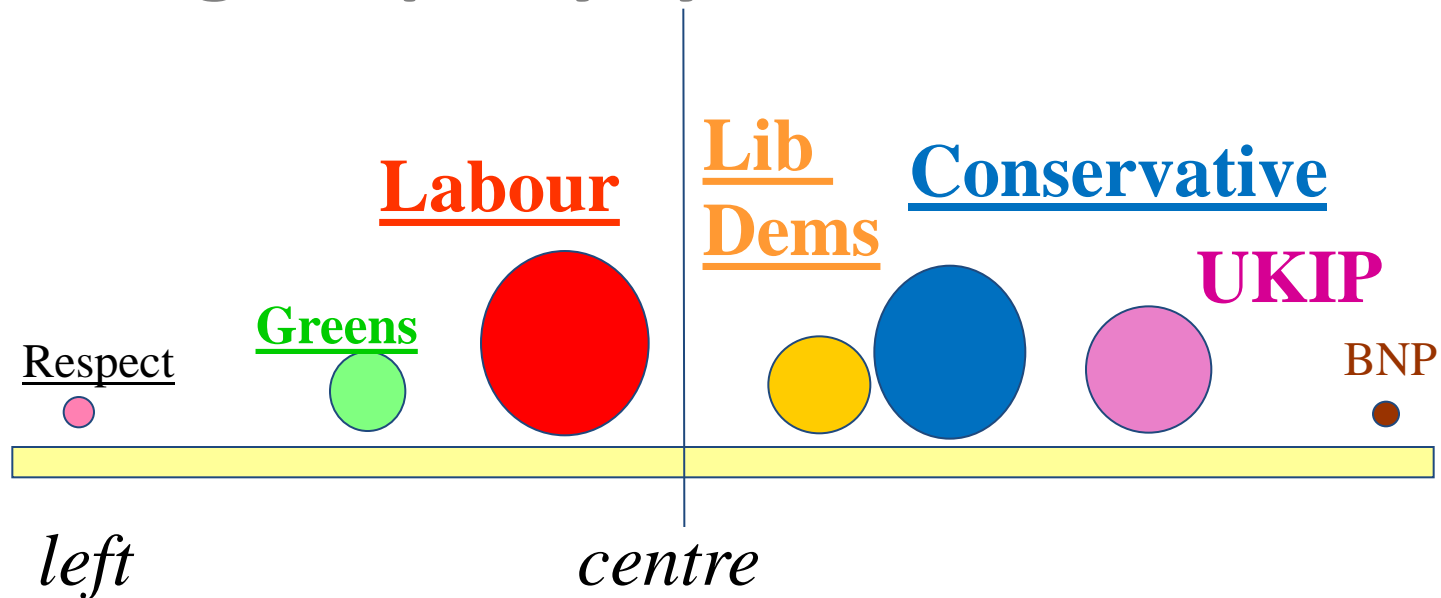
# State of the Parties since 2005

% vote share	Lab	Con	Lib Dem	UKIP	Greens	Rest	Lab lead
2005	36	33	23	2	1	5	+ 3
2010	29.5	37	23.5	3	1	6	-7.5
2013 EP	25.5	24	7	27.5	8	8	+1.5
Polls (Nov 2014)	33	32	8	15	5	7	+ 1

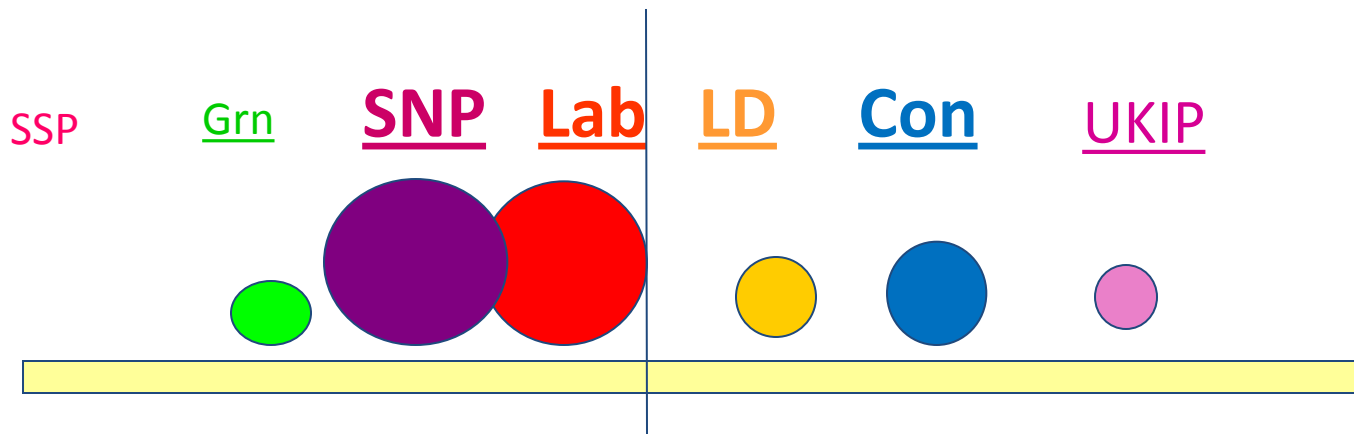
# The 2014 party system, in England



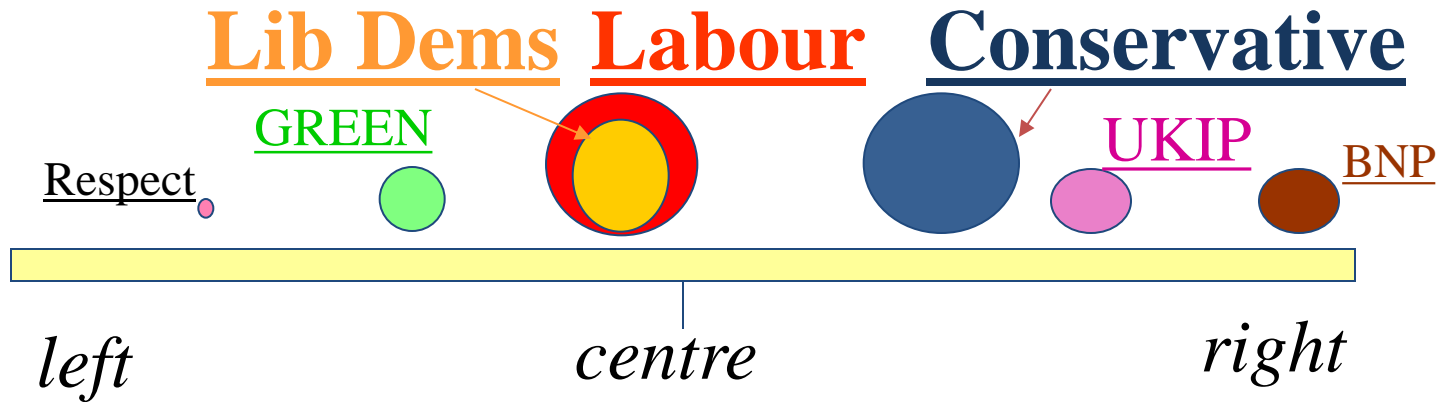
# The English party system



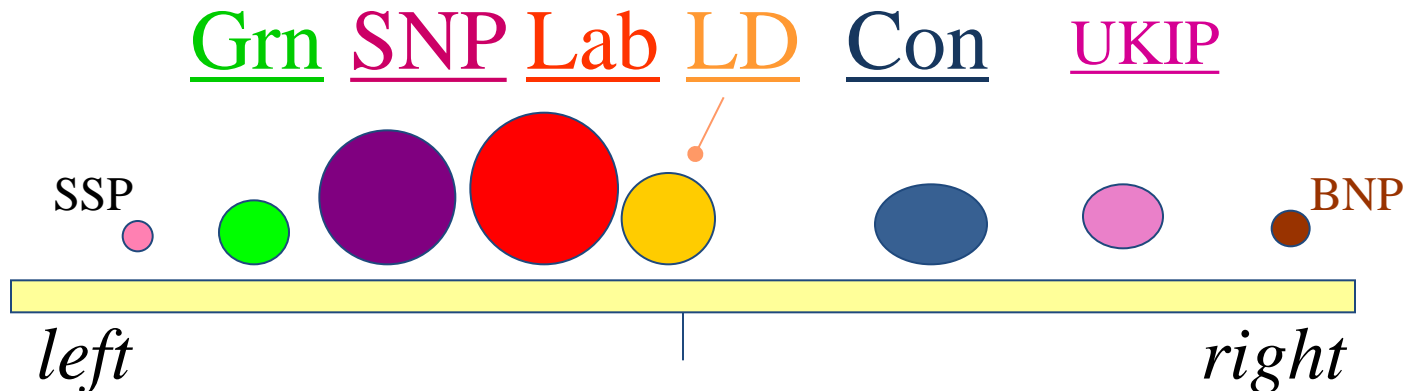
# The Scottish party system



A lot has changed  
- the 2010 English party system



- the 2010 Scottish party system



# Three key motors of party system change

despite the non-reform of Westminster and local voting

- Class dealignment
- PR elections since 1997, introducing new voting systems, especially the Supplementary Vote, Additional Member System, and List PR – broadening voters' experience nationwide
- Multi-tier elections – European elections, and devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and London (+ Northern Ireland) – so-called cross-tier “contagion effects”



## ***Per cent of each 'occupational class' voting for main parties, general election 2010***

Occupational class	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Other parties	Total
Upper non-manual (AB)	39	26	29	7	100%
Routine non-manual (C1)	39	28	24	9	100%
Skilled manual (C2)	37	29	22	12	100%
Unskilled manual/ not working (DE)	31	40	17	12	100%

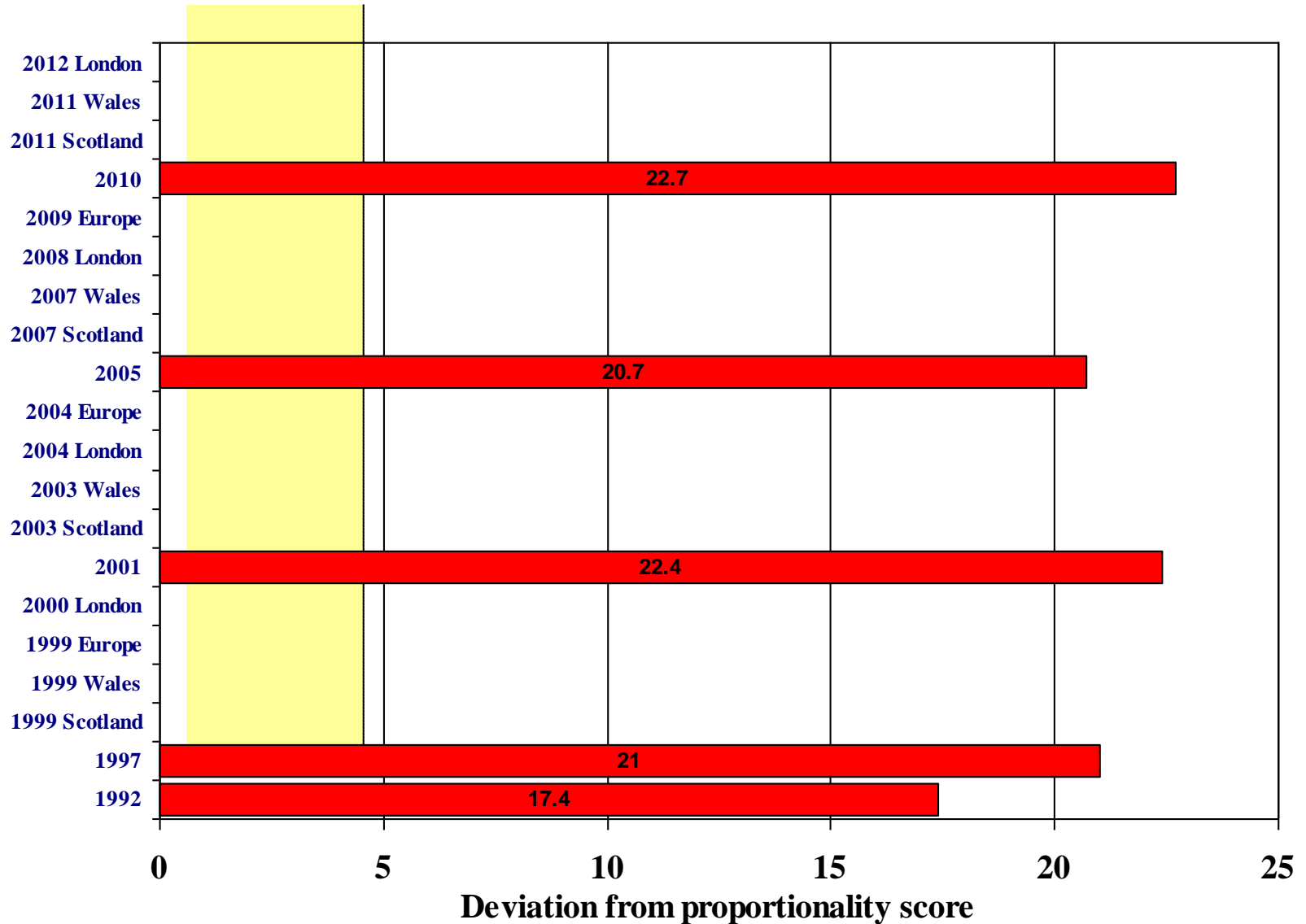
Source: Ipsos MORI (2010) 'How Britain Voted 2010'. <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2613>


# DV (deviation from proportionality) score

- We calculate the differences in seats shares compared with votes shares for each party
- Add up all the scores ignoring + or - signs
- Divide by 2 to remedy double-counting
- Gives DV score
- Note: Minimum DV score is 0%  
No maximum DV score – unless all MPs go to a party with no votes at all, which is not a democracy

Party	Vote %	Seats %	Deviation
Con	35	45	+10
Lab	30	38	+8
Lib	20	7	-13
Other	5	0	-5
<i>Total (Ignore = or -)</i>			<i>36</i>
<i>Deviation from Proportionality</i>			<i>18%</i>

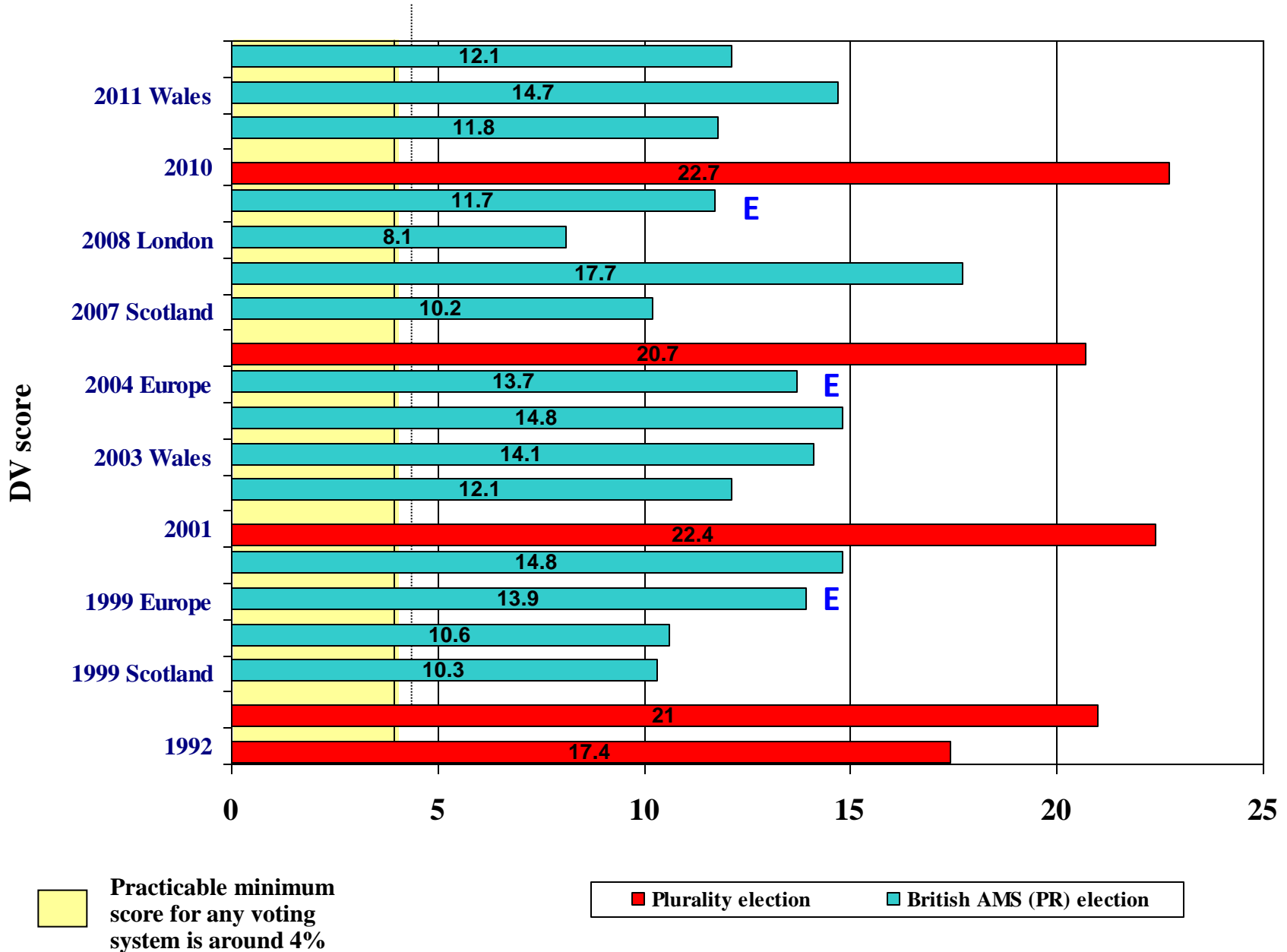
# 'Deviation from proportionality' scores, 1992-2012



 Practicable minimum score for any voting system is around 4%

 Plurality election

# 'Deviation from proportionality' scores, 1992-2012

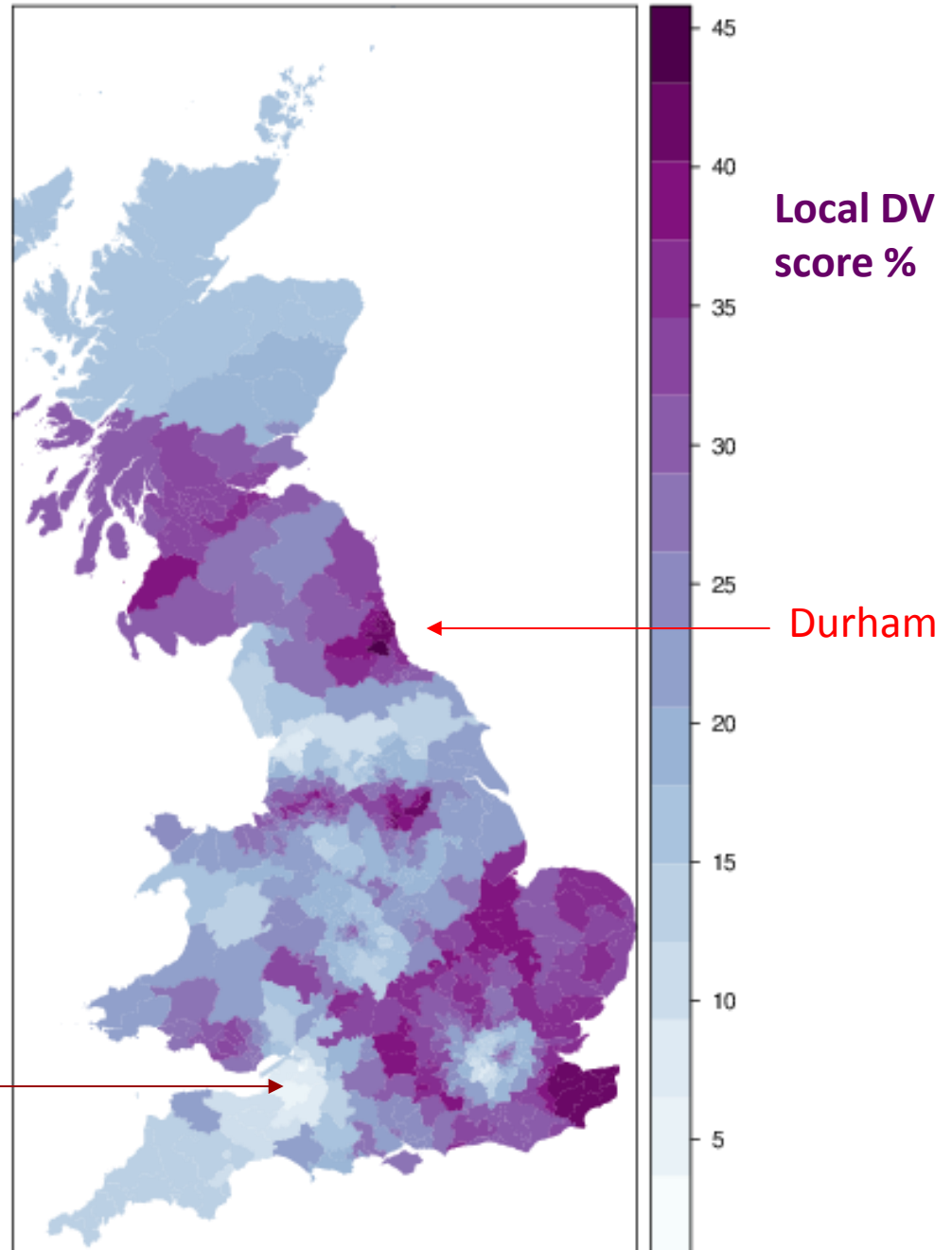


# Local DV scores in the 2010 general election

By Chris Hanretty  
(Univ of East Anglia)

The darker the colour,  
the higher the DV  
score in the 30 seats  
around constituency X

South west

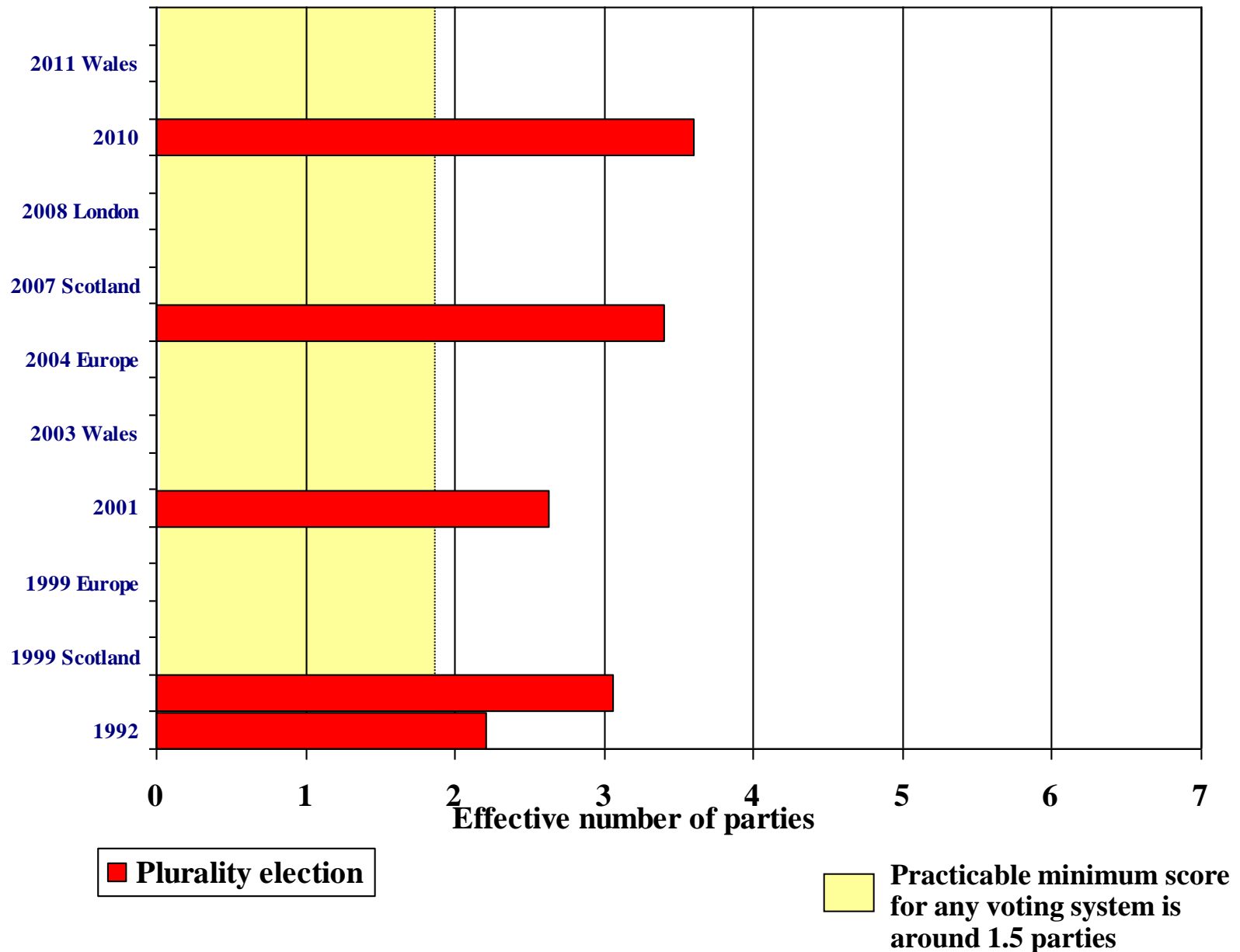


# Counting parties – the ENP score

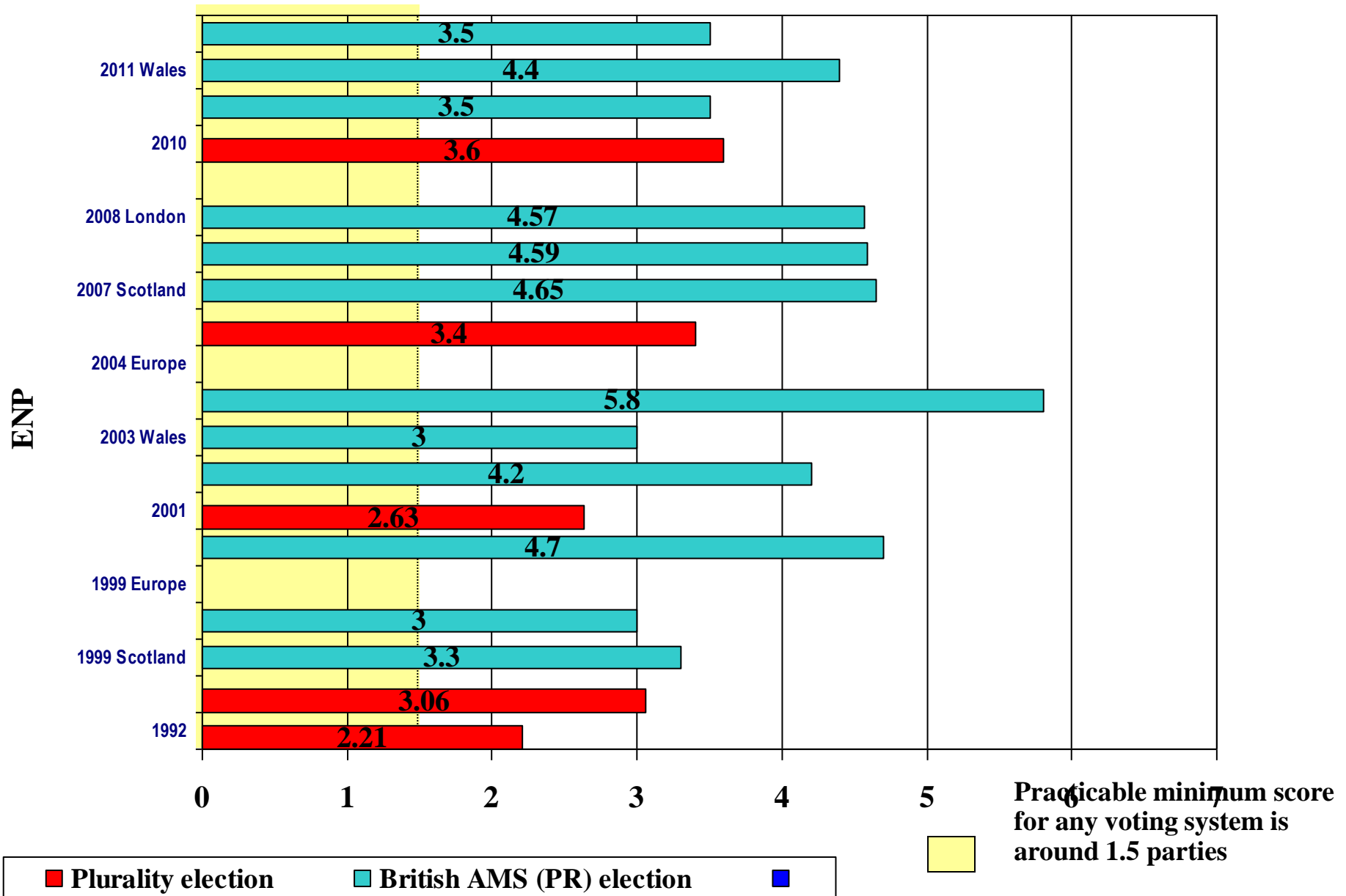
- We calculate the effective number of parties (ENP) by squaring the decimal vote shares, summing and dividing 1 by the sum
- The squaring process weights the contribution of large parties highly, and marginalizes that of small parties
- Here 1 divided by 0.312 = 3.21 parties

Party	Vote	Vote sq
Con	.38	0.144
Lab	.35	0.123
Lib	.20	.04
Others	.07	.005
<i>Total</i>		<i>0.312</i>

# 'Effective number of party' scores since 1992

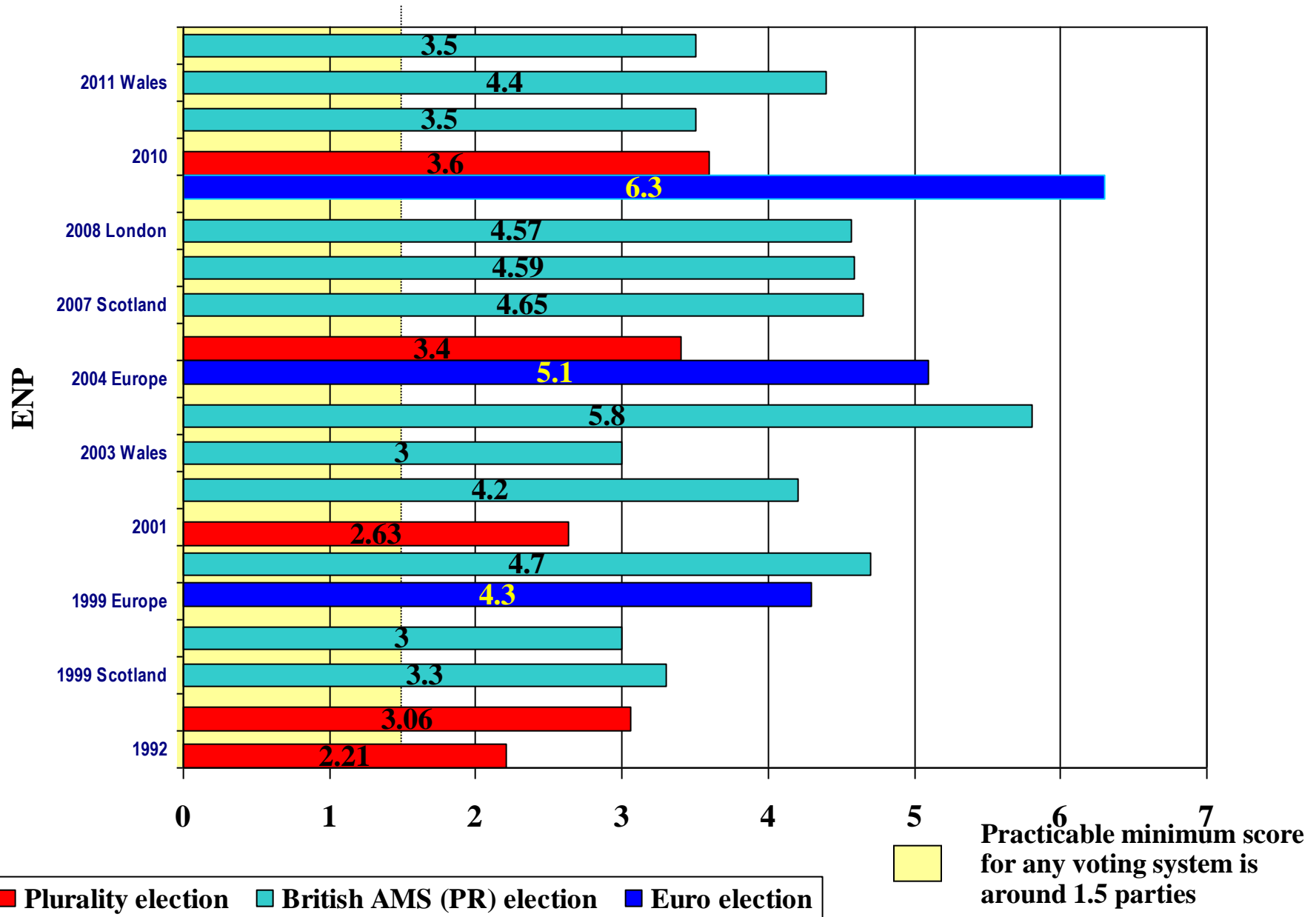


# 'Effective number of party' scores, 1992-2012

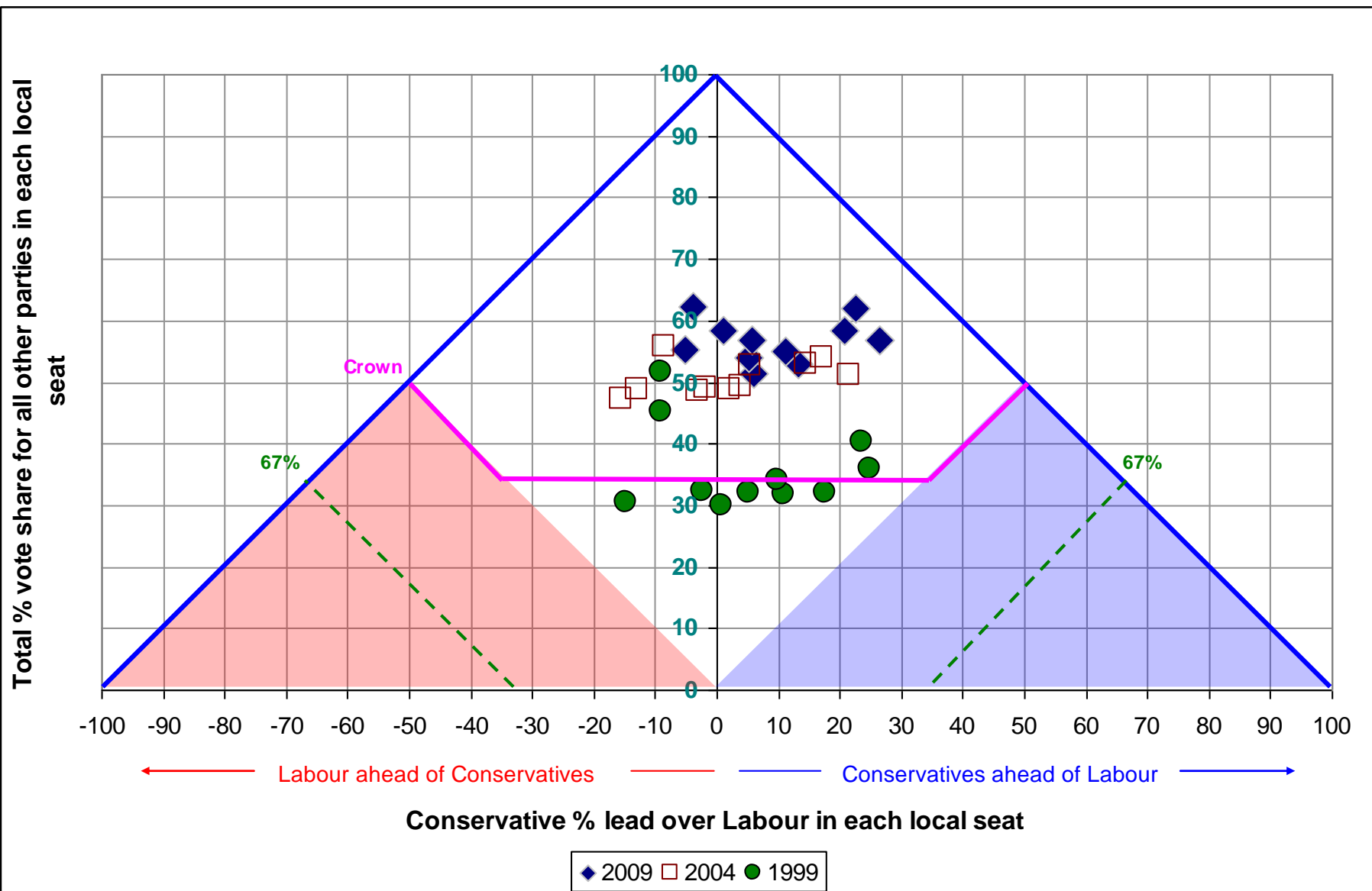




# 'Effective number of party' scores, 1992-2012



# Outcomes of the European Parliament elections in Great Britain in 1999, 2004 and 2009, using regional list PR systems





**Thanks for listening**

**Next week:**

**Party System – Ideology, Strategy,  
Governance and Policy-making aspects**