

Richard Burden MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON, SW1A 0AA

Proportional Representation

A number of constituents have written to me backing a change to the voting system for the House of Commons based on proportional representation.

I have long been a supporter of electoral reform. To me, it is a basic principle of democracy that the composition of Parliament should broadly reflect the proportion of votes secured by different parties and candidates. In the system of First Past the Post used in the UK, however, that is too rarely the case. Take the 2015, election for example, where the Conservatives won a Commons majority despite have only secured just 36.9% of the vote. Two years later, The Conservatives actually polled slightly better than they had in 2015 but lost their majority. The reality is that election results that are produced by the First Past the Post voting system is a lottery, whichever party comes out on top from time to time.

So changing the voting system is about making the results of elections fairer but to me it is also about more than that. It is also about reconnecting more people with the politics by helping to change the culture in which politics operates in this country.

The First Past the Post voting system encourages a culture of negative campaigning and tactical voting where people are urged not to vote for Party A because they are told that party has no chance in the constituency concerned and that they should instead vote for Party B to stop Party C winning. All parties use those arguments but the negative campaigning that they bring with them is a profound turn-off for many people and it can weaken confidence in the political system.

On top of that, under First Past the Post elections tend to be won and lost in the

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relatively small number ultra-marginal seats which are likely to change hands. Not surprisingly, parties focus their campaigning efforts on those seats and increasingly on the voters in those seats that they identify as likely to shift their votes from election to election. Most constituencies however, and most voters, do not fall into those categories because of way votes spread around country between constituencies,

The Electoral Reform Society estimates around 68% of votes rarely have much impact on the results of general elections. That is about 22m people. Small wonder, then, that so many people feel by-passed by the way see politics operating.

When people feel the political system does not relate to them or that they are not listened to, moreover, the consequences for democracy can be serious – breeding and insular inward-looking atmosphere in which extremist – particularly Far Right views flourish, and stoking xenophobia and dividing communities.

Of course, the causes of disaffection which many people feel towards mainstream politics has its roots in a lot more than the voting system and tackling that disaffection from with politics requires a great deal more than changing that system. However, I believe our electoral system is part of the picture and that it would help restore faith in politics to adopt a system where every vote counts, whichever constituency and whichever part of country that vote is cast.

I hope this gives you some idea of my reasons for backing the introduction of a more proportional voting system in the UK and can I thank everyone who has got in touch with me on this issue.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Burden'.

Richard Burden MP
Birmingham Northfield