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Playing the System: Electoral Bias in the 2024 UK General Election

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Abstract
The UK's 2024 general election was the least proportional of modern times. Labour's substantial parliamentary majority rested on the smallest ever winning party vote share. The Conservatives, meanwhile, suffered one of their worst ever results. While political and economic events during the 2019–2024 Parliament were key to the outcome, the operation of the first past the post electoral system was also important. In 2024, it was strongly biased in Labour's favour and against the Conservatives, contributing substantially to the scale of their defeat and of Labour's victory, allowing Labour to parlay modest support into a large majority. This pro-Labour bias was to a large extent a result of the much greater efficiency of Labour's geography of support. We place the relative Conservative-Labour bias at the 2024 contest into a longer historical perspective, demonstrating that it marked the abrupt end of a ten-year period in which electoral bias had favoured the Conservatives.

Keywords: Electoral bias, 2024 general election, electoral system

Introduction

STRIKING DISCREPANCIES between parties' vote shares and their numbers of elected MPs, and inconsistencies in how one translates into the other from election to election, are by no means unknown under the first past the post (FPTP) system used to elect the UK's Westminster Parliament, but in recent elections these have come thick and fast. Between 2010 and 2015, for instance, the Conservatives' national vote share (36.1 per cent and 36.9 per cent respectively) hardly changed. But whereas in 2010 the party did not obtain a parliamentary majority—necessitating a coalition with the Liberal Democrats—it did so in 2015. Two years later, Theresa May went back to the country and increased the Conservatives' vote share to 42.3 per cent—their highest level of support since Mrs Thatcher's mid-1980s glory days—but in the process she lost the Conservatives' majority: greater support produced fewer MPs. Two years on, it was Boris Johnson's turn to lead the Conservatives into an election. Although the party's vote share increased only slightly on 2017 (up to 43.6 per cent), its haul of MPs was much greater, delivering it an eighty-seat majority, the largest for the Conservatives since 1987. Similar oddities have typified how the system has rewarded other parties. In 2015, for instance, the Liberal Democrats received substantially fewer votes than the UK Independence Party (UKIP)—2.4 and 3.9 million votes respectively—but only one UKIP MP was elected, compared to eight Lib Dems. To say the least, the link between popular vote and MPs elected has proved capricious.

But even by these standards, the UK's 2024 general election stands out as distinctly peculiar. Just four and a half years after their 2019 triumph, the Conservatives crashed to their worst electoral defeat of modern times, reduced to only 121 MPs and 23.7 per cent of the vote. Their main rival's fortunes went in almost the opposite direction, meanwhile. 2019 had been a terrible result for Labour: with just 32 per cent of the vote, it returned 202 MPs, its smallest parliamentary contingent since 1935. But in 2024, 412 Labour MPs were elected, giving the party its second largest parliamentary majority ever—174 seats, just shy of Tony Blair's 177 seat majority following the 1997 Labour landslide. It achieved this triumph despite only marginally improving on its 2019 vote share, up by a mere 1.6 percentage points to 33.7 per cent. This, it is worth noting, was the lowest vote share

obtained by the winning party at any modern UK general election, and much lower than any previous election winner who achieved a decent majority.

Although FPTP is not meant to produce proportional representation, the 2024 results were out of kilter even by its usual standards. As measured by the widely-used Gallagher index of disproportionality, the mismatch between the political complexion of the new House of Commons and the voters' expressed preferences at the ballot box was the largest of any modern UK election.[1] In 2024—as in previous contests—the electoral system treated the two parties with the largest vote shares very differently from each other. One Labour MP was elected for every 23,738 votes the party received. For the Conservatives, the ratio of MPs to votes was 1:56,437. In other words, Labour voters were 2.5 times more likely to elect an MP from their preferred party than were Conservatives.

Why were the parties' returns to their vote shares so out of line with each other in 2024? What was it about how each was treated by the electoral system that explains their very different fortunes? In this article, we look more closely at Conservative-Labour electoral bias in the 2024 contest. What was it that helped Labour maximise its returns so well compared to its main rival? And to what extent did bias at the 2024 election follow, or deviate from, patterns in earlier elections?

An approach to measuring electoral bias

To answer these questions, we need to assess the extent to which the electoral system is biased in favour of, or against, each party. But to do so, we cannot rely simply on the proportionality, or otherwise, of the election outcome. The fact that Labour, the most popular party in 2024, obtained an even higher share of MPs elected than it did of the vote, while for the Conservatives received a lower proportion of MPs than of votes is not in itself evidence of bias in favour of Labour. After all, supporters of FPTP elections would argue that this is simply what such elections are normally meant to achieve. One of the system's supposed effects is that it generally exaggerates the representation of the most popular party relative to its rivals.[2] So this outcome is just the electoral system doing what it is meant to do: had another party come out ahead in 2024, then under FPTP rules we would normally expect it to receive a boost in terms of its share of MPs. Labour's more effective conversion of votes into MPs in 2024 compared to its rival is not in itself evidence of bias.

We turn, therefore, to a different metric for measuring bias in plurality elections. Originally proposed in the early 1960s by Ralph Brookes, the approach rests on a simple and intuitive concept.[3] If an electoral system treats two parties in the same way and without bias, then if they achieve the same share of the national vote, they should elect the same number of representatives. But if one party elects more MPs than another party with the same vote, then the electoral system is biased in favour of the former party relative to the latter, and the discrepancy between them in the number of MPs elected can be used as an index of the size of the bias.

In practice, it is rare for two parties to achieve exactly the same vote share at any given election. However, it is possible to simulate what the election outcome might have been had they done so, by applying a nationally uniform swing in vote shares from one party to the other in every seat, assuming that other aspects of the election in each seat (turnout and support for the other parties) remain unchanged. In what follows, we apply a swing between Conservatives and Labour sufficient

[1]D. Difford, 'Election 2024: our least representative election ever', *Make Votes Matter*, Blog, 6 July 2024; https://makevotesmatter.org.uk/news/2024/7/6/election-2024-our-least-representative-election-ever/.

[2]J. A. Chandler, 'The plurality vote: a reappraisal', *Political Studies,* vol. 30, no. 1, 1982, pp. 87–94; D. Farrell, *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*, London, Red Globe Press, 2011; A. Renwick, *The Politics of Electoral Reform: Changing the Rules of Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[3]R. Brookes, 'Electoral distortion in New Zealand', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1959, pp. 218–223; R. Brookes, 'The analysis of distorted representation in two-party, single-member elections', *Political Science*, vol. 12, 1960, pp. 158–167.

for both parties to tie on a national vote share half-way between their actual vote shares in the real election. So, if the Conservatives took 46 per cent of the vote, and Labour 32 per cent, we apply a nationally uniform swing of 7 percentage points from Conservative to Labour, to tie on 39 per cent of the vote each. Assuming nothing else changes, applying this swing from Conservative to Labour in every seat will change the winner in some seats, allowing us to compare how many seats each would be likely to win if their national vote shares were tied at 39 per cent. The resulting gap in seats won is our measure of bias.

The sources of electoral bias

Under FPTP, electoral bias can arise from a number of different sources. For instance, parliamentary constituencies' electorates vary in size and the degree of variation can increase over time between reviews of the constituency map, as local populations change at different rates (constituency boundary reviews occur periodically to reduce these size disparities). If one party tends to be more popular in seats with smaller electorates, while the other is more popular in seats with larger electorates, then that can bias the electoral system in favour of the former party relative to the latter, as—other things being equal—the first party will require fewer votes to win each seat than will the latter.

Where disparities in constituency electorates are deliberately created to produce such an advantage, the electoral abuse is referred to as malapportionment. But malapportionment-like effects can arise 'naturally' too, as a consequence of population change over time. We refer to this below as a 'constituency size' bias.

A similar effect can be created by measures which 'protect' constituencies in some parts of a country compared to others. In the United Kingdom, for instance, up until 2011—when new legislation required that each review of constituency boundaries should ensure that all but a very small handful of new seats throughout the country should have electorates within ±5 per cent of the national average electorate—the rules governing boundary reviews protected the number of seats given to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As their populations declined relative to England's, that meant constituency electorates there tended to become smaller than electorates in English seats. If one party is more popular in the areas with smaller constituencies, and another is more popular in areas with larger constituencies, that too will produce a bias in favour of the former party (as once again it will require fewer votes to win each seat). We refer to this below as the 'national quota' bias—though the new boundary review legislation introduced in 2011 has since removed this source of bias from British elections.[4]

Another malapportionment-like bias can arise from differential turnout rates across constituencies. If one party in a pair tends to gain more support in seats where turnout is relatively low and the other in seats where it is high, the former party gains an advantage as (other things held constant) it will require fewer votes to elect each MP. This creates a 'turnout bias' in favour of the former party.

Similarly, the relative distribution of third party support can also affect the number of votes required to win a seat, and hence the relative bias between two parties. A 'third party votes' bias occurs when one party in a pair is more popular in seats where third parties win a large share of the vote (but not quite enough to win) and the other party is more popular where third parties' vote shares are lower. Again, this effectively reduces the number of votes the former party in the pair requires to win relative to the latter. But once third parties start to do well enough in seats to actually win there, the resulting 'third party wins' bias works to the disadvantage of parties whose support is also high in such seats (because they do not win them) and to the advantage of rivals who are more popular in seats where third parties do not win.

A final source of potential bias arises not from factors influencing the number of votes required to win a seat, but from the relative efficiency with which a party's votes are distributed across seats. Under FPTP rules, all that is required to win a seat is to obtain one vote more than the party in second place there. Any votes obtained over this threshold are in effect wasted: the seat has been won, whether the majority obtained in doing so is one vote

[4]R. J. Johnston, C. J. Pattie, C. J. and D. Rossiter, *Representative Democracy? Geography and the British Electoral System*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021.

or 10,000 votes, and the excess votes do not contribute to the election of any further MPs. Similarly, being a gallant loser in a seat also wastes votes, as no matter how close one's vote is to that of the local winner, none of those votes contributes to the election of an MP for one's party. Ideally, therefore, in a FPTP system, parties with highly efficient vote distribution will either win seats by small margins or will lose by large margins (so wasting as few votes as possible).

This 'efficiency bias' can be affected by the distribution of a party's voters relative to the map of constituency boundaries. But it can also be affected by parties' constituency campaign strategies, which in FPTP elections aim to mobilise support where it is most likely to influence the local result. Efficient campaigns therefore put most effort into seats which are marginal for the party, and much less into seats where the result is almost certain. The goal is to avoid either excessively large majorities or substantial votes in seats one cannot win, while maximising the chances of retaining seats one might otherwise lose or winning seats one could readily take from rivals. At the extreme, the most efficient vote spread possible would involve a party obtaining no votes in seats where it cannot win, and only one vote more than the second-placed party in seats it does take.

Clearly, in practice, no party would want to risk so efficient a vote distribution, as that would mean very small shifts in support away from the party would result in the loss of many seats it previously held by narrow margins, while small swings to the party would be insufficient to win many seats where its support was deliberately very low. Even so, parties might prefer a more, rather than a less efficient, vote distribution across seats as (once again) that will tend to maximise the number of seats they win for each vote cast. The efficiency bias therefore advantages parties with more efficient vote spreads over rivals with less efficient distributions. The relative fortunes of Labour and the Liberal/SDP Alliance in 1983 is a case in point. The two had similar national vote shares. But the Liberal/SDP Alliance won around 25 per cent of the vote in most seats it contested—a respectable showing, but rarely enough to win a seat. Hence, most of those votes were wasted. Labour, meanwhile, did quite well in some seats, but badly in others. And because its support was geographically uneven, it managed to win a respectable haul of contests in seats where its vote was relatively concentrated, while wasting fewer votes in seats where it did not perform quite well enough to win. Labour's vote distribution in 1983 was in that sense more efficient than the Liberal-SDP Alliance's.

As well as estimating the extent and direction of electoral bias between two parties, Brookes' method also provides algebra to 'decompose' that bias into each of the different sources outlined above.[5] In the following sections, we therefore apply Brookes's method to look at how the electoral system treated Labour relative to the Conservatives. Who gained most from the electoral system in 2024, and what bias components helped or hindered these parties relative to each other? We also put these comparisons into longer historical perspective, comparing how the electoral system treated the parties at every general election between 1997 and 2024.

Electoral bias at the 2024 general election

We turn first to the 2024 election itself. The relative Labour-Conservative biases and the shares attributed to each bias component for that contest are shown in Figure 1. The bias figures represent the difference in number of seats won by Labour over the Conservatives if they tied on their national vote shares at the half-way point between their actual 2024 shares. A positive bias value shows how many more seats Labour would win compared to the Conservatives, while a negative value shows how many fewer seats it would have obtained.

The sheer scale of Labour's landslide win in 2024 owed much to the interaction of its vote and the electoral system, which helped the party translate its mediocre national vote share into an extremely large parliamentary majority. Even had Labour and the Conservatives tied on national vote share at 29.5 per cent each (the half-way point between their actual 2024

[5]For the algebra, see R. J. Johnston, C. J., Pattie, D. F. L. Dorling and D. Rossiter, *From Votes to Seats: The Operation of the UK Electoral System since 1945*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001.

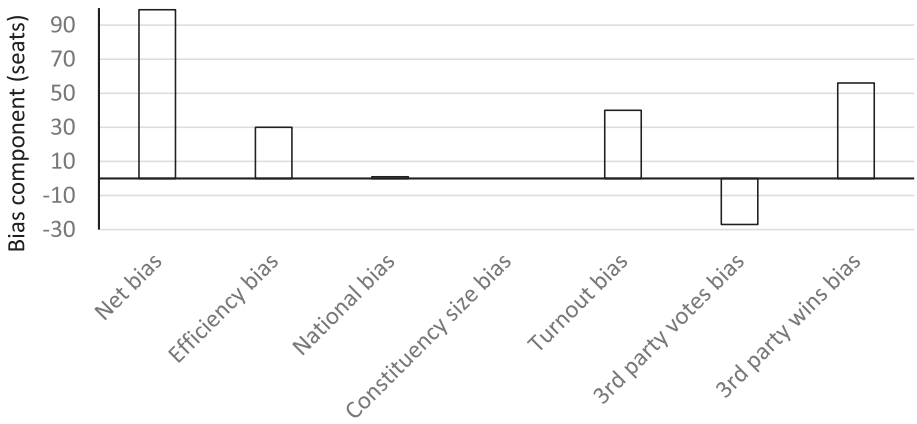

Figure 1: Labour-Conservative electoral bias at the 2024 UK general election

vote shares, requiring a 5.1 per cent swing from Labour to Conservative), net bias would still have favoured Labour, to the tune of ninety-nine more seats than the Conservatives—a very substantial advantage.

Decomposing the Labour-Conservative bias into its constituent sources reveals how this huge pro-Labour advantage came about. As the 2024 contest was the first to be fought in new constituencies drawn up under the rules adopted in 2011, which mandated that virtually all seats should have electorates which deviated only slightly from the national average, the constituency size and national quota biases played little part. But two factors worked very substantially in Labour's favour. First, compared to the Conservatives, Labour was more popular in areas where turnout was lower in 2024. Average turnout in seats Labour actually won in 2024 was 57.2 per cent, compared to 64.4 per cent where the Conservatives were the winners. In the event (and at equal vote shares for the two parties), this 'turnout' bias would have been worth an extra forty seats for Labour compared to the Conservatives

The relative efficiency of Labour's 2024 vote distribution compared to the Conservatives also worked in the former's favour. This source alone would have netted Labour thirty more seats than the Conservatives. One way of illustrating this is to look at what proportion of each party's vote was 'wasted' in 2024, where wasted votes are all those cast for a party in seats it lost, plus its majority minus one in seats it won. While 55 per cent of Labour's 2024 vote was wasted according to this definition, this was true of 76 per cent of the Conservative vote (see Table 1). In large part, the relative greater efficiency of Labour's 2024 vote was because the Conservatives lost in many more seats than Labour. Around 69 per cent of the Conservatives' 2024 votes were cast in seats the party lost, and hence had no effect on the number of MPs elected for the party. In contrast, only 22 per cent of Labour's votes were cast in seats that did not return a Labour MP.

Not all aspects of Labour's vote distribution were quite as efficient, however. Where it won in 2024, it tended to do so by larger margins than its Conservative rivals where they won—Labour's average majority in seats it won was nearly 8,000 votes, almost twice as large as the Conservatives' average winning majority. And while surplus votes in seats the party won (its winning majority there minus one vote) made up a third of Labour's total national vote in 2024, they formed just 7 per cent of the Conservatives' overall vote. But this effect was substantially outweighed by the relative numbers of votes cast for each where they lost. And as noted above, too efficient a vote distribution has its disadvantages. Although they reduced its vote efficiency, Labour's larger majorities in seats it won give the party a more comfortable cushion than its rival going into the next election.

Not all of the bias components worked so consistently in Labour's favour, however. Third party effects had mixed implications. Higher levels of third party support—short of

Table 1: Inefficient votes for Labour and the Conservatives at the 2024 election

	Votes for party in 2024	
	Conservatives	Labour
Total votes cast for party	6,826,758	9,704,655
Votes cast for party in seats it lost in 2024	4,706,650	2,110,848
Votes in seats lost as % of total votes:	68.9%	21.8%
Average votes per seat lost in 2024	9210.7	9551.35
Surplus votes for party in seats it won in 2024	494,390	3,215,304
Surplus votes in seats won as % of total votes	7.2%	33.1%
Average surplus votes per seat won in 2024	4085.9	7823.1
Total inefficient votes for party, 2024	5,201,040	5,326,152
Total inefficient votes as % of total vote	76.2%	54.9%
Average inefficient votes per seat 2024	8229.5	8427.5

actually winning a seat—in a constituency decreased the bias to Labour relative to the Conservatives. Other things being equal, the third party votes bias was worth twenty-seven fewer Labour than Conservative seats. The bias resulting from third party wins, meanwhile, helped Labour relative to the Conservatives in 2024, to the tune of a fifty-six-seat Labour advantage at equal vote shares—as Liberal Democrat and Reform wins especially tended to be more frequent in seats that would previously have been Conservative.

Labour parlayed its very modest 2024 vote share into a landslide, thanks in large part to how its support interacted the electoral system, relative to its main rival. Greater vote efficiency, more support in low-turnout constituencies, and fewer losses to third parties—largely a function of Labour's recovery relative to the SNP in Scotland and to the Liberal Democrats posing more of a threat to the Conservative than to Labour—stood the party in very good stead.

The long story: Labour-Conservative bias, 1997–2024

But it was not always this way. From a longer-term perspective, the 2024 election marks a substantial shift in who benefits from electoral bias at British general elections (Figure 2 shows the trends between the 1997 and 2024 elections: net Labour-Conservative bias is represented by the thick black line). Whether Labour or the Conservatives was that the main beneficiary from electoral bias has shifted back and forth over time.[6] In the 1950s, the Conservatives received a small net advantage. This was in substantial measure thanks to provisions within the rules then in place for drawing up parliamentary constituencies which allowed for smaller seats in rural areas, where the Conservatives tended to be electorally strong.

After those provisions were removed from the rules, the electoral system was even-handed in how it treated Labour and the Conservatives for much of the period from the 1960s to the 1980s: net bias between the two was both small and inconsistent in direction (though smaller parties were substantially under-represented). Labour tended to benefit from turnout, national quota and constituency size effects, as it tended to be more popular than the Conservatives in seats with lower turnout, and in areas—such as Scotland and Wales, and old industrial towns and cities—with relatively declining populations, and where seats therefore tended to become smaller. The Conservatives, meanwhile, benefited from a generally more efficient vote distribution than, and from 'third party' effects. The pro-Labour biases were largely cancelled out by the pro-Conservative ones, resulting in only small overall net bias between the two parties.

But from the early 1990s, things began to change. Between 1992 and 2010, the net Labour-Conservative bias began to favour Labour consistently and often substantially. The pro-Labour bias peaked at the 2001 general election, when, had the two been tied on national vote share, Labour could have expected to win 141 seats more than the Conservatives. It declined thereafter, but even at the 2010 election—which Labour lost—electoral

[6]Johnston, et al, *Representative Democracy?*

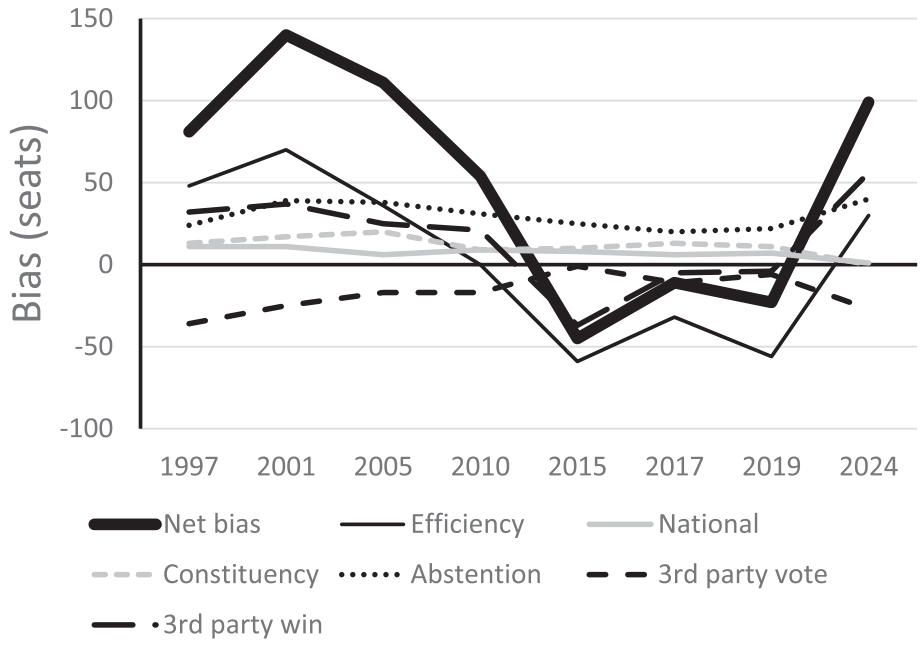

Figure 2: Labour-Conservative electoral bias, 1997–2024

bias was worth an additional fifty-four seats to Labour over the Conservatives at equal vote shares.

A small part of this new pro-Labour bias came from constituency size effects, arising from Labour's tendency to do better in Scotland and Wales, and in seats with declining populations (the solid and dotted grey lines in Figure 2). Rather more, however, came from turnout and third party wins effects (the black dashed lines in Figure 2), which also favoured Labour—not least as the most successful third party over this period, the Liberal Democrats, tended to take seats from the Conservatives. But the largest factor behind the pro-Labour bias was the much-improved efficiency of that party's vote distribution compared to its main rivals (the 'efficiency bias', denoted by the solid thin black line in Figure 2). In the past, Labour had often racked up large but wasted majorities in seats it won, and respectable—but insufficiently large to win—votes in seats it lost. But from the 1990s, it began to focus more attention on its support in marginal seats, where a few votes either way might affect the result. In consequence, the party began to waste fewer votes.

In contrast, the Conservatives continued to build substantial majorities in seats they already held. This was in large part a function of the party's structure at the time: Conservative local associations were largely independent of the national party, and the best resourced of these—and hence the best able to mount active campaigns—tended to be in safe Conservative seats.[7] While Labour's campaign strategy and hence vote distribution became more efficient in the 1990s, therefore, the Conservatives' did not—hence the widening efficiency gap between them.

The relative advantage Labour enjoyed over the Conservatives from the operation of the electoral system lasted for around two decades, though it declined in size after 2001. But although the party still enjoyed a relative advantage in 2010, there were signs that this might not last. Most strikingly, the efficiency bias which had sustained Labour's advantage since 1992 evaporated at that election, as the Conservatives began to increase the efficiency of their own campaigning. In 2010, Labour's

[7] C. J. Pattie and R. J. Johnston, 'Paying their way: local associations, the constituency quota scheme and Conservative party finance', *Political Studies*, vol. 44, no. 5, 1996, pp. 921–935; R. J. Johnston and C. J. Pattie, *Money and Electoral Politics: Local Parties and Funding in General Elections*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2014.

'system' advantage over the Conservatives was maintained only by third party wins, national and constituency size effects, and turnout—all factors which were beyond its control.

In subsequent elections, from 2015 to 2019, the pro-Labour net bias was replaced by a pro-Conservative one. In 2015, for instance, had the two achieved the same vote shares, the Conservatives would have come out with around forty-seven more MPs than Labour. That net Conservative advantage was still present, though somewhat smaller, in 2017 and 2019. It was built mainly on two things. First, the Conservatives began to benefit more than Labour from vote efficiency effects, worth between thirty-two and sixty more seats for them compared to their main rivals. Second, third party winner effects, which previously had worked against the Conservatives and for Labour, now began to work in the opposite direction, largely because of Labour's collapse and the SNP's rise to dominance in Scotland after the 2014 independence referendum there, and because of the Liberal Democrats' slump in votes and representation after their spell in coalition with the Conservatives from 2010 to 2015, from fifty-seven to just eight MPs.[8] Of the two major parties, Labour was now the one most likely to be in second place behind a third party winner—mainly the SNP in Scotland).

But as we saw above, this decade-long period of Conservative advantage over Labour in the electoral system ended in 2024, when Labour once again became the major beneficiary. This was particularly ironic, as the 2024 election was the first to be fought in seats drawn up under the 2011 Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act. That legislation, enacted by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, had been drawn up to—among other things—rationalise and clarify the rules around periodically redrawing parliamentary constituencies.[9] One aim was to reduce the extent of biases produced by substantial differences in electorates between constituencies which grew as the constituency map aged. That bias, as we have seen, tended to favour Labour, and many Conservatives saw it as a major contributor to Labour's electoral system advantage between 1992 and 2010. Mandating more frequent reviews and greater equality in constituency electorates would, they hoped, remove Labour's system advantage. However, as we discuss above, most of that advantage came not from varying electorates, but from the efficiency and turnout biases. And the Conservatives established a systemic advantage over Labour between 2015 and 2019 while the old constituency boundary rules still applied (and, indeed, with an increasingly elderly constituency map). They did so by making the efficiency bias work in their favour over that period. And it was losing that efficiency advantage again which turned the tables on the party in 2024, the 2011 Act notwithstanding (the new constituencies first used in 2024 were drawn up using the 2011 rules). Whatever the merits of the 2011 legislation, therefore, it was not the answer to the Conservatives' electoral system disadvantage relative to Labour from 1992 to 2010. The answer, it seems, actually lay in their own hands as campaigners and politicians—through actions such as targeting campaign effort in key swing seats, and avoiding serious policy mistakes such as those which led to a catastrophic collapse of support in 2024 and put previously safe Conservative seats in play.

Conclusions

Many things, not least public reactions to the previous Conservative government's record in office contributed to the Conservatives' record-breaking defeat in 2024, and almost certainly played a larger part in that outcome than electoral bias. Events such as the Partygate scandal and the economic fallout from Liz Truss's mini-budget were undoubtedly major factors driving down Conservative support. Nigel Farage's decision to stand for Parliament also made an impact, giving a substantial boost to Reform and contributing to a split vote on the right which further damaged the Conservatives' already poor chances. Under its new leadership, meanwhile, Labour

[8] A. Henderson, R. Johns, J. C. Larner and C. J. Carman, *The Referendum that Changed a Nation: Scottish Voting Behaviour 2014–2019*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022; D. Cutts, A. Russell and J. Townsley, *The Liberal Democrats: From Hope to Despair to Where?*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2023.

[9] Johnston, et al., *Representative Democracy?*.

presented a more electable face to the electorate, and was also helped by the SNP's travails after Nicola Sturgeon stood down as that party's leader and Scotland's first minister.

Even so, while the Conservative vote collapsed in 2024, Labour's—despite the expectations from pre-election polls—did not surge. And here is where electoral bias helped make a difference. Partly by design and partly by a degree of luck, Labour benefitted from how the UK's electoral system transfers votes into seats. By winning support in the right places, they were able to parlay moderate support into impressive wins. Electoral bias was an important factor behind the scale of Labour's 2024 victory and the Conservatives' defeat.

From a longer-term perspective, the ten-year period in which the Conservatives had a net advantage over Labour in how the parties were treated by the electoral system came to an end in the 2024 election. Net electoral bias now once again favours Labour over the Conservatives, and in no small measure this has been owing to the benefits of both the efficiency and the third party winner biases moving back in Labour's direction. A ruthlessly efficient 2024 campaign, placing little emphasis on seats Labour already held and even on some Conservative held Labour target marginals, paid major dividends for the party. So too did the SNP's collapse and the Liberal Democrats' recovery, which swung the third party winner bias back towards them. At least from the perspective of the Labour-Conservative contest, bias has come full circle: in that sense at least, 2024 is 1997 all over again!

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