

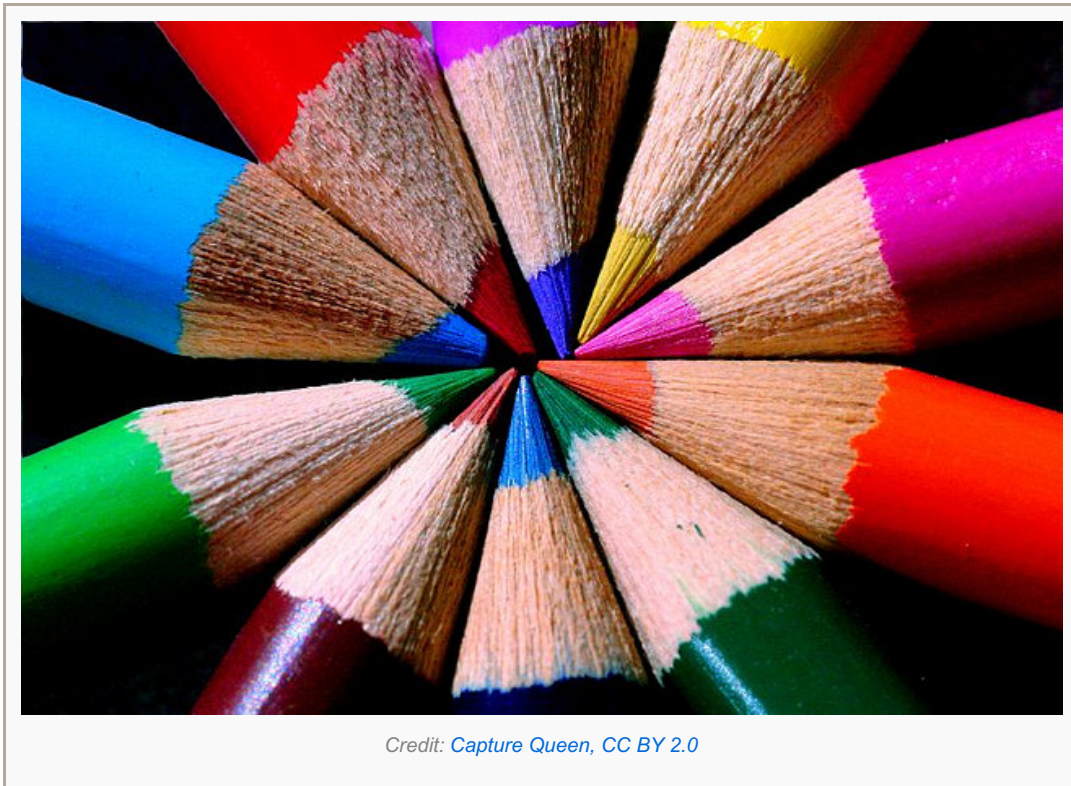
The 2015 General Election shows why we need a 'None of the Above' option on ballot papers

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By Democratic Audit UK

2015-5-11

*The 2015 General Election saw a Conservative majority government returned (albiet on a minority of the vote) for the first time since 1992. While the First Past the Post electoral system may be disproportionate and antiquated, **Jamie Stanley** of the None of the Above campaign argues that a more pressing matter is introducing a 'None of the Above' option on ballot papers.*



Once again, the UK's antiquated [First Past The Post](#) (FPTP) voting system has delivered a government that the vast majority of the registered electorate (around 63%) actively [voted against](#). Parties with a sizeable share of the popular vote once again have a tiny share of seats in parliament, while parties with far less popular support have been awarded a disproportionately large share of seats.

Not surprisingly, everyone who has lost out to this system this time around, from UKIP to the Green party and everyone in between, is now calling for electoral reform in the form of [Proportional Representation](#) (PR).

There can be no doubt in any rational, sane person's mind that when you have more than two parties vying for office, FPTP is a farcical and redundant voting system and that a more proportionally representative system is long overdue.

But campaigning for PR alone is not the place to start if we truly want to reform our electoral system.

Because, no matter who wins a UK election, FPTP absolutely ensures that only either Labour or the Tory parties, neither of which have anything to gain from PR's introduction, can ever call the shots in government by virtue of always having at least four times as many seats *each* as the next nearest party. This is true even in coalition,

because whichever of them is called upon to form one will always have easily twice as many seats as all their junior partners combined under FPTP. If coalition government in the UK (and indeed parliament as a whole) were about grown up compromise, this would not necessarily be an impediment to progress. But in a childish numbers game where the [party/government whip](#) is king, ensuring that the party with the most voting power *always* rules the roost, real progress and radical change is nigh on impossible.

Not only do neither of the two dominant parties have anything to gain from changing the voting system, they can never be put under any real pressure to do so because, as undemocratic as FPTP is, they can always say it is 'democratic enough' as it always delivers a majority in parliament one way or another. For this reason, no matter how loud the calls for it, they can always pay lip service to PR (as a desirable reform only) and then do precisely nothing about implementing it.

By stark contrast, inclusion of a formal 'None of the Above' (NOTA) option on ballot papers is an achievable reform as it can be shown to be a democratic pre-requisite, 100% essential in any true democracy and impossible to argue against without arguing against democracy itself, once properly understood (see [here](#) and [here](#) for why).

With enough widespread understanding of this fact, NOTA could eventually become an inevitable government concession to appease a population increasingly aware of its democratic rights, just as votes for women and the welfare state were won before it. From there, the playing field would already have been levelled considerably, as all parties would be compelled to work harder for more votes or risk having more people visibly and formally reject them at the ballot box than actually vote for them. In such a landscape, the prospect of further democratic reform ought to be significantly improved.

Without this first step, there is no reason whatsoever why any Tory or Labour dominated government would introduce PR. If electoral reform is the order of the day, then the achievable reform of NOTA must surely be the logical starting point.

We now have an unprecedented window of opportunity to pile pressure on the newly elected government to introduce this potentially game changing and undeniably essential electoral reform. Because thanks to NOTA UK's lobbying (and some 71.8% of around 16,000 survey respondents calling for it), the parliamentary select committee for Political & Constitutional Reform (PCRC) felt compelled to recommend in its [final report](#) on increasing 'voter engagement' (published in February 2015) that the next government consult before May 2016 solely on inclusion of NOTA on ballot papers. They concluded that there is not only huge demand for NOTA, but that there would be a clear, positive impact on voter engagement of having it. This is a huge step forward for our campaign.

When you really understand the extent of the democratic deficit in the UK, it becomes clear that NOTA is the ground zero of electoral reform upon which all other democratic reform could be built. For this reason, it *must* now be the priority of all pro-democracy reformists at this time. The alternative is five more years of ineffectual lobbying of turkeys to vote for Christmas with zero progress made and no end to the current, undemocratic two party system in sight.

People can support NOTA UK's campaign for real, achievable electoral reform by signing our petition [here](#) and by following and subscribing to us via these social media links which can be found [on our website](#).

Note: this post represents the views of the author, and not those of Democratic Audit or the LSE. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

Jamie Stanley is a professional recording artist, music producer and founder of [NOTA UK](#), campaigning since 2010 for an official 'None of the Above' option to be included on ballot papers for all future UK elections. His personal website can be found [here](#).

