

## The D'Hondt voting system and the results of the 2019 European Elections Analysis by the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform

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In the recent elections to the European Parliament, the Brexit party got more votes than any other party, and won 29 out of the 73 seats. Some commentators have attributed this result to the d'Hondt system which is used to allocate seats in the Euro elections, arguing that it is the d'Hondt system that allowed extremist parties to gain seats at the expense of Labour. The Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER), which is campaigning for reform of our Westminster voting system, wishes to clarify that the results of these elections were not distorted by faults of the D'Hondt system.\*

- **Labour's share of seats (13.7%, 10 out of 73) at the UK-wide level, was almost identical to the share of votes it received (14.1%).** Labour actually got *more* seats than votes in 6 of the 11 regions it contested<sup>†</sup>, but won no seats at all in the South West, Scotland and the East of England.

As to the alleged surge in representation for extremist parties produced by the D'Hondt system, the seat distribution formula works as follows:

- **D'Hondt rewards the leading nationwide party with extra seats in relation to its vote share. The Brexit party got the most votes (a hefty 31.6% of the vote) and therefore benefited from a modest boost in seats (39.7% of the seats, or 29 out of the 73 seats allocated to the UK).** The "First Past the Post" voting system currently used for general elections in the UK gives a much bigger boost to the largest party. **If the EU elections had been held under FPTP, the Brexit Party, which topped the poll in all but two regions, would have won many more seats than it did under the d'Hondt system.**
- **The D'Hondt seat allocation method does not give seats to very small parties – parties receiving less than 10% of the vote nationwide typically do not win seats<sup>‡</sup>.** The SNP and Plaid Cymru won seats in the Euro elections because they gained a large vote share in their own regions. The Greens won seats because they won 12% of the national vote (very close to Labour's vote share of 14%), not because the d'Hondt system gave them an advantage at the expense of Labour.
- **The D'Hondt formula generally gives medium-sized parties a share of seats similar to their share of the vote.** The Lib Dems, with 20.3% of the vote, got 21.9% of the seats. Labour, with 14.1% of the vote, got 13.7% of the seats. The Greens, with 12% of the vote, got only 9.6% of the seats – less than their vote share, but the D'Hondt allows the Greens to participate in political life to a far greater extent than under FPTP, as long as it gets around 10% of the vote, well-distributed nationwide. The Conservatives with only 9.1% of the vote got 5.5% of the seats (4 out of 73).

**Our conclusion is that the electoral system used in the European Elections produced a fair result, consistent with the fundamental characteristics of the system used.**

**The Brexit party won most seats in the European elections because it won the most votes. It got a higher percentage of seats than votes (39.7% of seats, against 31.6% of votes), because of a small "winner's bonus" built into the d'Hondt system.**

**The winner's bonus in the d'Hondt system is much smaller than the winner's bonus in "First Past the Post". If the recent Euro elections had been held under FPTP, the Brexit party would probably have won many more seats than it did under d'Hondt.**

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\* Designed by Auguste d'Hondt. The small 'd' is widely replaced by the capital D.

† Labour does not stand candidates in the Northern Ireland region.

‡ This is quite a high threshold, much higher than the threshold of 5% which is applied in the German system.

## **APPENDIX. Effects of the PR D'Hondt electoral system – European Elections 2019.**

Comparing proportions of votes with proportions of seats, by party and region

### **NATIONAL RESULTS: 73 seats**

<b>Brexit party:</b>	<b>31.6%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>39.7% of seats</b>
<b>Lib Dems:</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>21.9 % of seats</b>
<b>Labour:</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>13.7% of seats</b>
<b>Greens:</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>9.6% of seats</b>
<b>Conservatives:</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>5.5% of seats</b>
<b>SNP:</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>4.1% of seats</b>
<b>Plaid Cymru:</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>of votes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>1.4% of seats</b>

### **A. Regions with 8-10 seats**

#### London - 8 seats

Lib Dems got	27.2% of the votes and	3/8 of the seats = 37.5% of the seats
Labour got	23.9% of the votes and	2/8 of the seats = 25% of the seats
Brexit got	17.9% of the votes and	2/8 of the seats = 25% of the seats
Greens got	12.5% of the votes and	1/8 of the seats = 12.5% of the seats

*Comment: Labour, Lib Dems and Brexit were advantaged by D'Hondt, especially the Lib Dems, being the leading party.*

#### North West of England – 8 seats

Brexit got	31.2% of the votes and	3/8 of the seats = 37.5% of the seats
Labour got	21.9% of the votes and	2/8 of the seats = 25% of the seats
Lib Dems got	17.2% of the votes and	2/8 of the seats = 25.5% of the seats
Greens got	13.5% of the votes and	1/8 of the seats = 12.5% of the seats

*Comment: Brexit, Labour & Lib Dems were advantaged by D'Hondt; the Greens won seats in proportion to their votes.*

#### South East of England – 10 seats

Brexit got	36% of the votes and	4/10 of the seats = 50% of the seats
Lib Dems got	25.8% of the votes and	3/10 of the seats = 30% of the seats
Greens got	13.5% of the votes and	1/10 of the seats = 10% of the seats
Conservatives got	10.3% of the votes and	1/10 of the seats = 10% of the seats
Labour got	7.3% of the votes and	1/10 of the seats = 10% of the seats

*Comment: A full spectrum of 5 parties got seats, because the 'district magnitude' was relatively high (10 seats). Brexit and the Lib Dems were advantaged; the Greens, Conservatives and Labour were slightly disadvantaged. This is a typical spread if using the D'Hondt method with 10 seats to distribute in one district.*

## **B. Regions with 6-7 seats**

### South West England – 6 seats

Brexit got	36.7% of the votes and	3/6 of the seats = 50% of the seats
Lib Dems got	23.1% of the votes and	2/6 of the seats = 33% of the seat
Greens got	18.1% of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 17% of the seats

*Comment: the leading party and the runner-up were considerably advantaged, and the Greens' seat was in proportion to their vote share. Only 3 parties won seats because of the small number of seats to distribute (6).*

### Yorkshire and Humberside – 6 seats

Brexit got	36.5% of the votes and	3/6 of the seats = 50% of the seats
Labour got	16.3% of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 16% of the seats
Lib Dems got	15.5% of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 17% of the seats
Greens got	12.9% of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 17% of the seats

*Comment: Being the leading party in votes, Brexit was greatly favoured. Labour and Lib Dems got seats in proportion to their votes; the Greens coming 4th, were lucky to get a seat.*

### Scotland – 6 seats

SNP got	37.8% of the vote and	3/6 of the seats = 50% of the seats
Brexit got	14.8% of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 16.7% of the seats
Lib Dems got	13.8 of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 16.7% of the seats
Conservatives got	11.6% of the votes and	1/6 of the seats = 16.7% of the seats

*Comment: This is the only region outside London where Brexit was not the leading party, yet as the runner-up was marginally advantaged with 1 seat. The SNP as the leading party took half of all seats. The Lib Dems and Conservatives. Labour and the Greens lost out in Scotland.*

### East of England – 7 seats

Brexit got	37.8% of the votes and	3/7 of the seats = 43% of the seats
Lib Dems got	22.6% of the votes and	2/7 of the seats = 29% of the seats
Greens got	12.7% of the votes and	1/7 of the seats = 14% of the seats
Conservatives	10.3% of the votes and	1/7 of the seats = 14% of the seats

*Comment: Brexit as the leading party, and the Lib Dems as runner-up, were favoured by D'Hondt.*

### West Midlands – 7 seats

Brexit got	37.7% of the votes and	3/7 of the seats = 43% of the seats
Labour got	16.9% of the votes and	1/7 of the seats = 14% of the seats
Lib Dems got	16.3% of the votes and	1/7 of the seats = 14% of the seats
Greens got	10.7% of the votes and	1/7 of the seats = 14% of the seats
Conservatives got	10% of the votes and	1/7 of the seats = 14% of the seats

*Comment: Brexit as the leading party, received a boost of 5-6 percentage points; Labour and the Lib Dems were too far behind to receive a runner-up boost.*

### C. Regions with 3-5 seats

#### North East England – 3 seats

Brexit got	38.7% of the votes and	2/3 of the seats = 66.6% of the seats
Labour got	19.4% of the votes and	1/3 of the seats = 33.3% of the seats

*Comment: A region with very few seats eliminates all but the leading and runner-up parties.*

#### Wales – 4 seats

Brexit got	32.5% of the votes and	2/4 of the seats = 50% of the seats
Plaid got	19.6% of the votes and	1/4 of the seats = 25% of the seats
Labour got	15.3% of the votes and	1/4 of the seats = 25% of the seats

*Comment: The leading party received a substantial boost; the runner-up broke even, and Labour, in third place, was advantaged over the Lib Dems, who received a similar vote share but got no seats.*

#### East Midlands – 5 seats

Brexit got	38.2% of the votes and	3/5 of the seats = 60% of the seats
Lib Dems got	17.2% of the votes and	1/5 of the seats = 20% of the seats
Labour got	13.9% of the votes and	1/5 of the seats = 20% of the seats

*Comment: D'Hondt gives Brexit a very large advantage owing to its low 'district magnitude' of only 5 seats.*

Source: calculated by Monica Threlfall from data in Séan Clarke, Pablo Gutiérrez and Frank Hulley-Jones, European election latest results 2019: across the UK, 27.05.2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2019/may/26/european-election-latest-results-2019-uk-england-scotland-wales-ni-eu-parliament>