

What is the Alternative Vote?

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The Referendum Question

At present, the UK uses the first past the post system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the Alternative Vote System be used instead?

| | |
|-----|--|
| Yes | |
| No | |

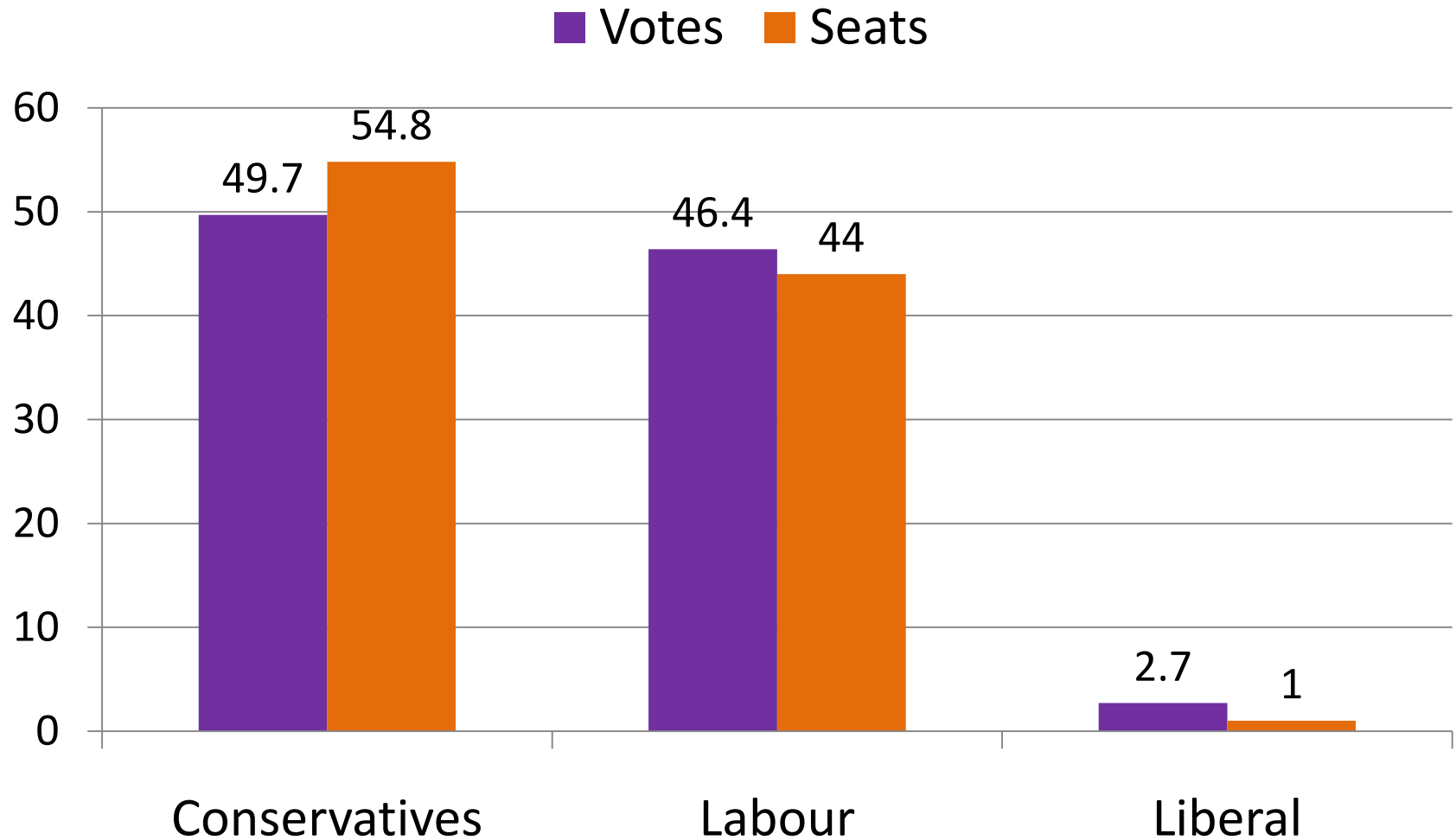
How FPTP works

- One MP elected per constituency ('seat')
- Voters draw a cross next to favoured candidate
- Candidate with the most votes wins – no need to have more than 50%
- Party which wins most seats wins the election

The case for FPTP

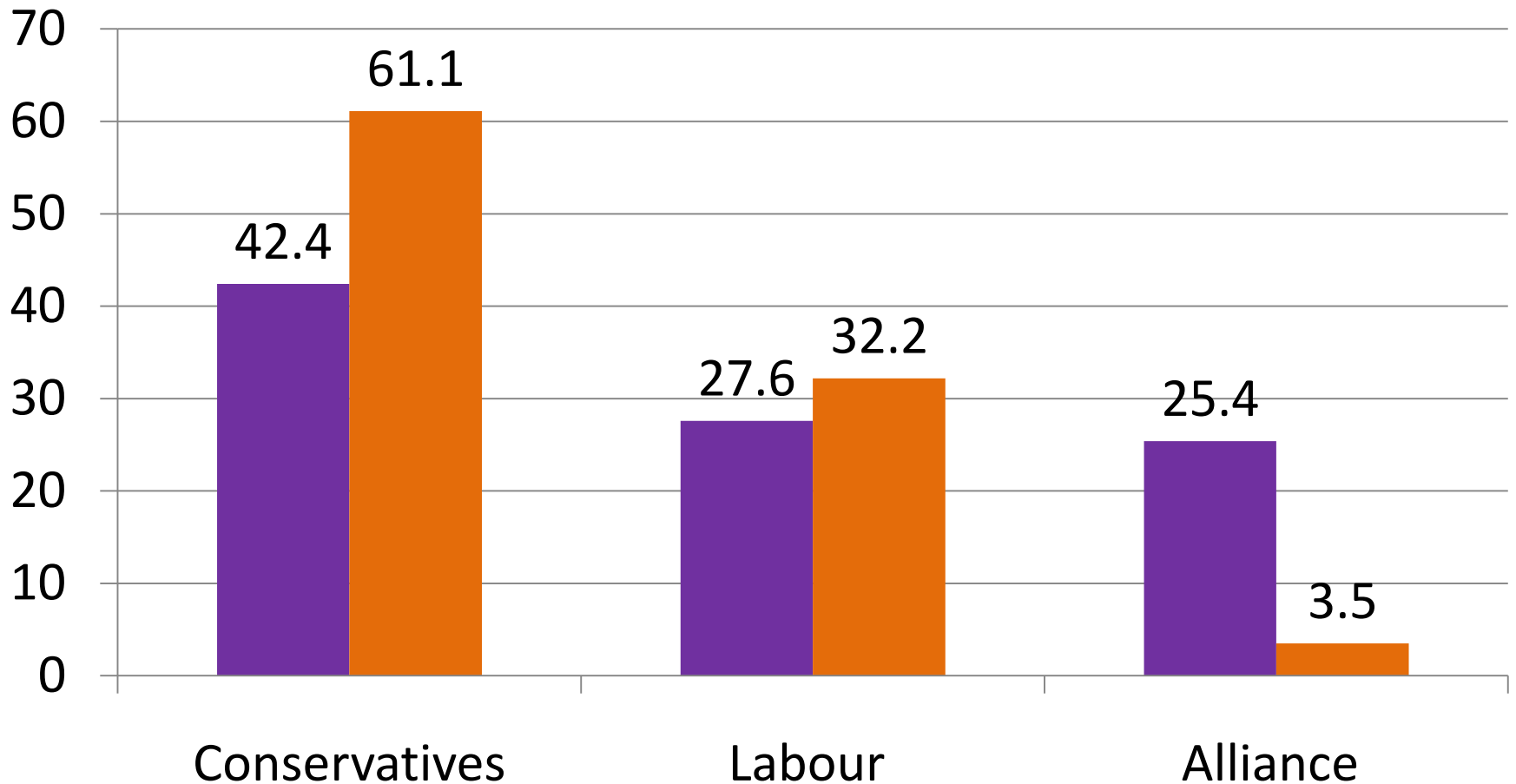
- Election results capture 'mood' of the country
- Voters can always 'kick the rascals out'
- Provides strong and stable government
- Avoids the need for coalitions

When it worked well: 1955



When it worked less well: 1983

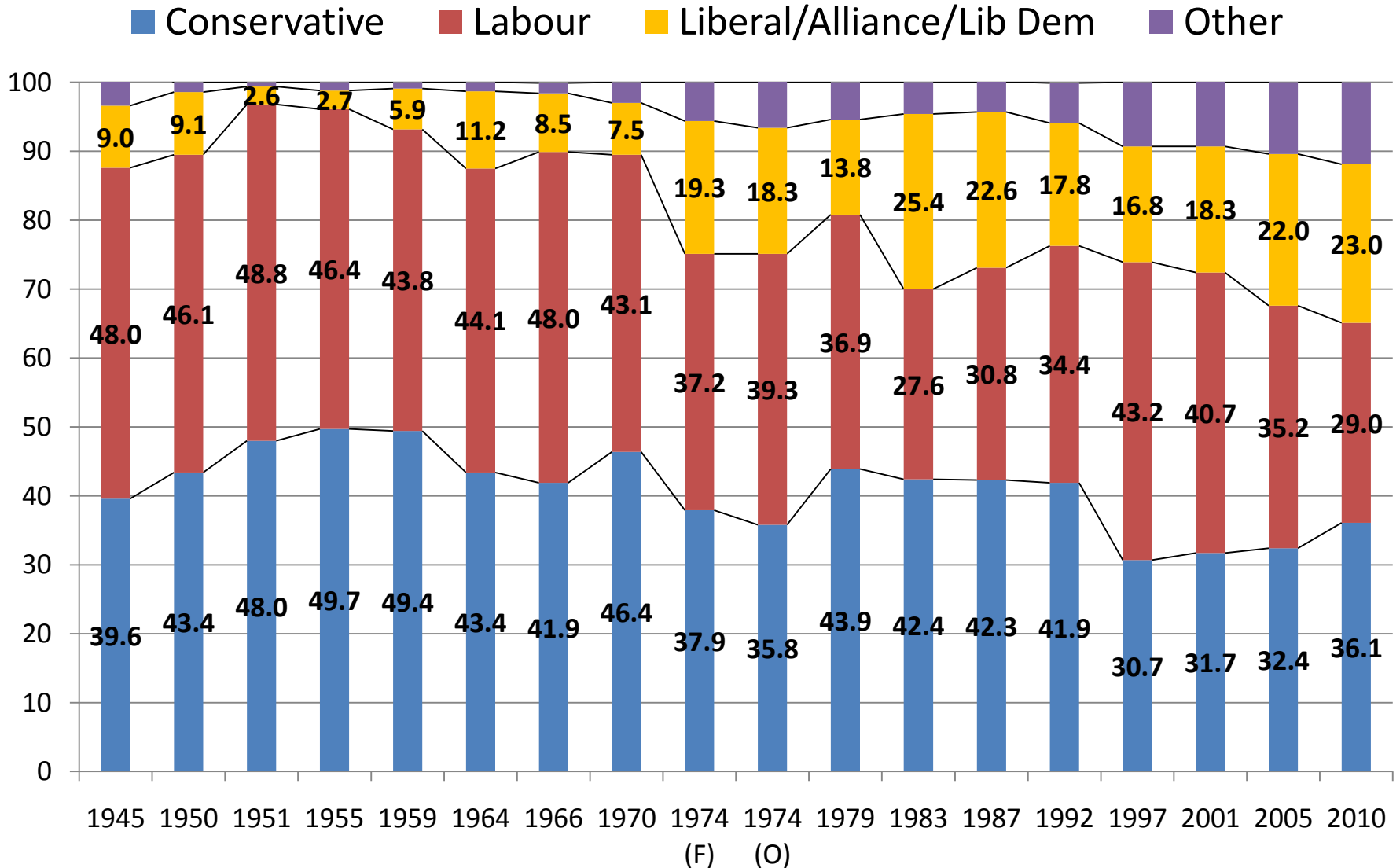
■ Votes ■ Seats



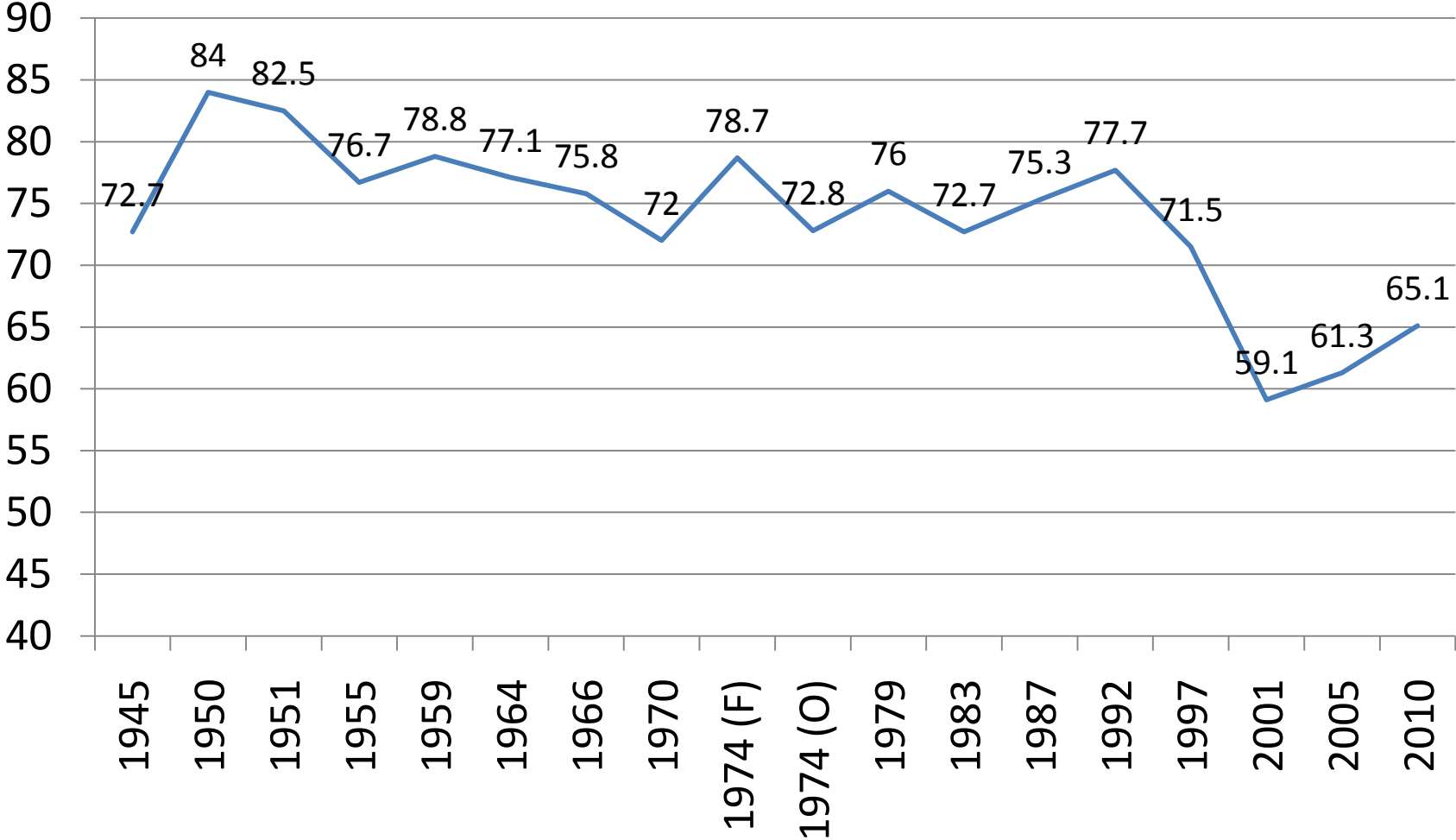
The problem facing FPTP

- Needs a two-party system to work well
- But more and more votes are going to other parties!
- And a lot of people are not voting at all!

Party share of the vote, 1945-2010



Turnouts at UK General Elections, 1945-2010 (%)



Why is this a problem?

- More and more MPs elected with <50%
- Unpopular government can stay in power with less than 45% of the votes
- People voting for losing candidates have no representation

What other systems are there?

- There are three ‘families’ of electoral systems:
 1. Plurality/majority systems
 2. Proportional representation
 3. Mixed systems
- AV is another plurality/majority system
- Proportion representation is most common worldwide & especially in the EU

How would AV work

- One MP elected per constituency ('seat')
- Voters ranks candidates using '1'; '2'; '3'; etc
- If any candidate gets 50% of first preferences they are elected
- If no candidate gets 50%, then the 2nd preferences of the bottom candidate are counted
- Process continues until somebody wins!

What difference could AV make?

- Lib Dems gain at expense of Lab & Con
- 'Hung' parliaments could become more likely
- Share of vote to smaller parties almost certain to increase (but not representation)
- Fewer 'wasted' votes and safe seats
- BUT: results could be more disproportional than under FPTP