

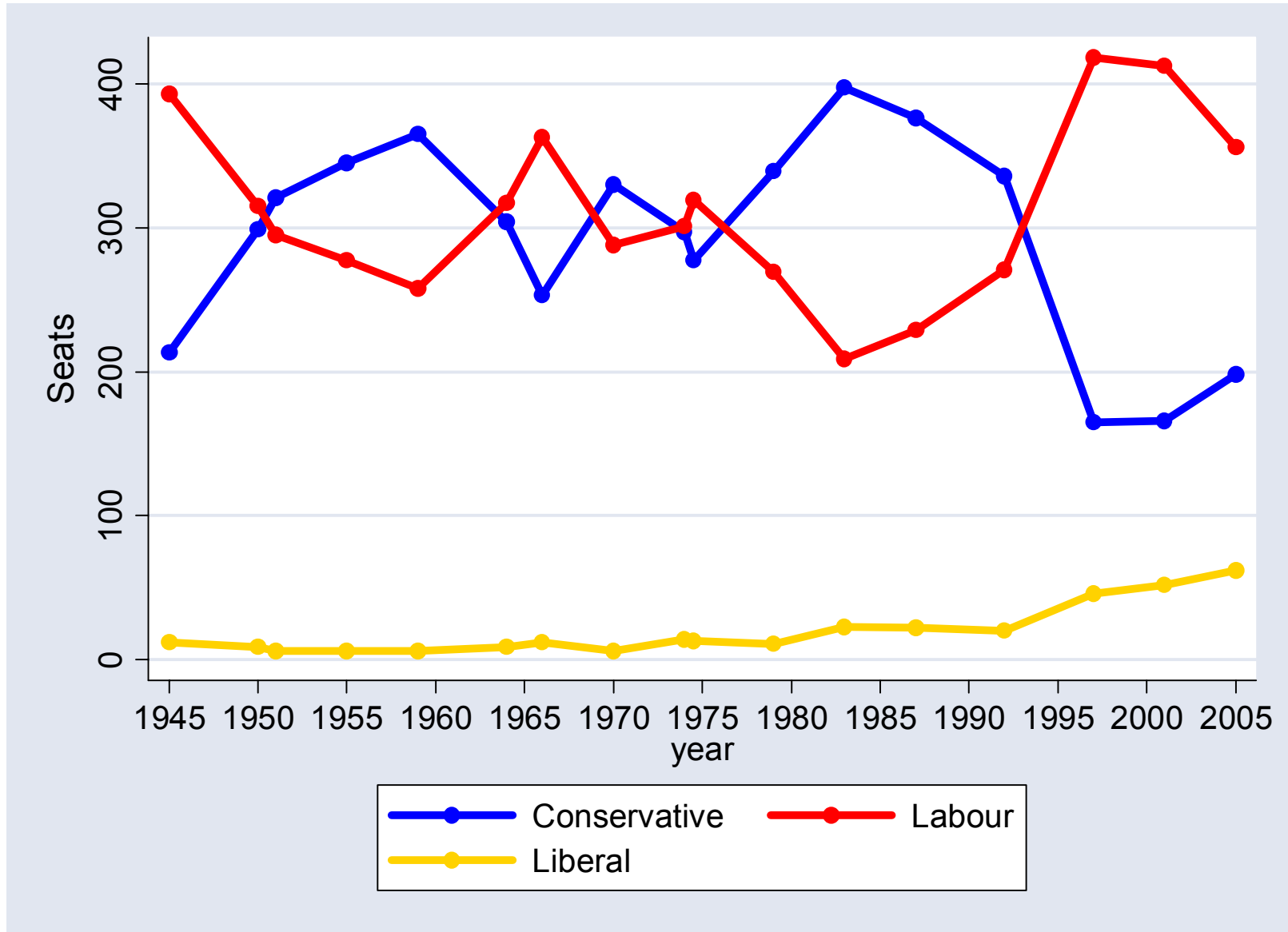
# The 2005 British general election: What the results tell us?

*Presentation by Stephen Fisher to the Trinity Society  
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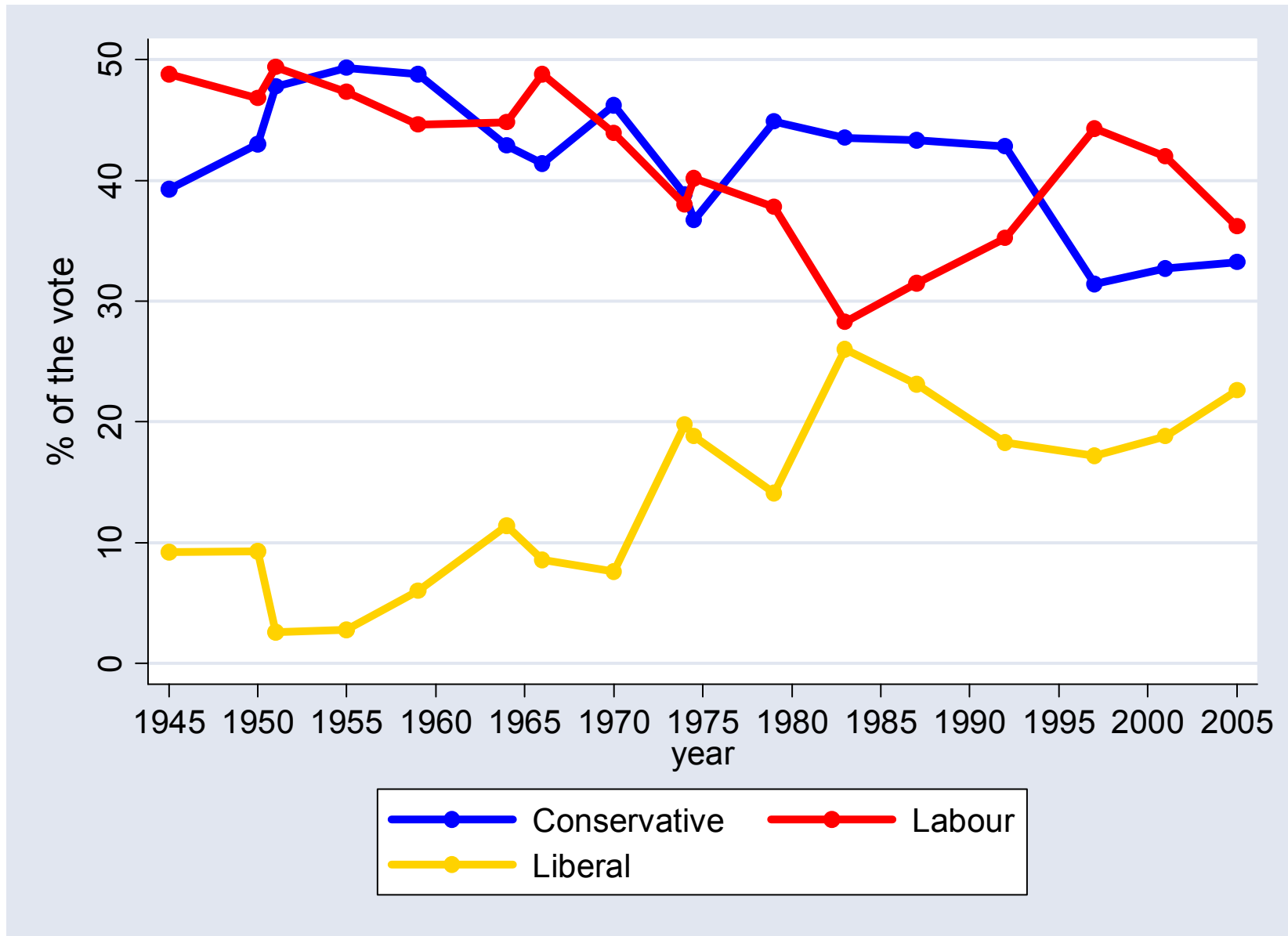
## **Outline**

- Result compared with other elections
- Labour and the Liberal Democrats
- The Conservatives
- Minors
- Candidate Characteristics
- Turnout
- The Electoral System
- Other Political Implications

## Result compared with other elections: seats



## Result compared with other elections: votes



## Fragmentation of the two-party system

Never has a party won an overall majority on such a low share of the vote.

- Of the four previous occasions when no party won more than 40%, only once (1923) was there a majority government.

No Labour administration has lost so much support during its period of office.

It was not the Conservatives but the Liberal Democrats and a range of minor parties that benefited.

The 1997 to 2005 period is the first spell of Labour government in which the Liberals have increased their share of the vote.

## Labour and the Liberal Democrats

*Iraq*: Two related but distinct issues - support for the war & trust in the PM

Polls followed events relating to the Iraq war and Labour undoubtedly lost support on the issue. However, trust was the most important factor

- Labour supporters were almost as anti-war as Lib Dem voters, but still trusted Blair.

Muslims in particular turned against Labour:

	Con	Lab	LD	
% Muslim				
Up to 1%	+0.4	-4.8	+3.1	(374)
1-5%	+0.4	-6.4	+4.1	(148)
5-10%	-0.1	-8.1	+6.1	(64)
More than 10%	-1.8	-10.6	+8.8	(39)

## Labour and the Liberal Democrats, continued

*Tuition fees:* Student areas protested against Labour

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	
% Students				
Up to 8%	-0.2	-6.0	+4.2	(281)
More than 8%	-0.3	-8.8	+7.5	(121)

### *Non-stories*

- No sign of any backlash against particularly Blairite MPs or candidates. It appears that the Labour party as a whole was punished.
- Whilst Labour suffered more where it started strongest, more working-class areas did not desert Labour disproportionately.
- The countryside turned against Labour in 2001, but party performance was the same in both urban and rural areas in 2005.

## Tactical voting

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	<i>Change in vote share</i>			
	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>3rd or lower in 2001</i>				
Con	-0.7	-5.6	6.7	(105)
Lab	1.0	-2.1	0.2	(106)
LD	0.3	-6.5	4.3	(460)
Overall	0.2	-5.8	3.9	(622)

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- Lib Dem to Labour tactical voting held up
- Labour to Lib Dem tactical voting unwound
- Tactical squeeze on the Conservatives

## The Conservatives reaching out?

	Con	Lab	LD
<i>Winner in 2001</i>			
Conservative	+1.3	-4.9	+2.1
Labour	-0.2	-6.7	+5.1
Liberal Democrat	+0.4	-1.5	+0.3
Nationalist	-1.4	-3.8	+3.4
Average	+0.2	-5.8	+3.9

Conservatives did best in their heartlands, especially the South of England

- perhaps due to the relatively poor performance of the economy.



## Changes in Party Preference Structure

*Average Strength of Feeling scores 2001 and 2005 for GB*

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	<i>2005</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2005-01</i>
Con	4.6	3.7	+0.9
Lab	5.2	5.6	-0.4
LD	5.2	5.1	+0.1

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Source: British Election Studies

- Surprisingly little change in Labour and Liberal Democrat ratings
- Decline in animosity towards the Conservatives
- Increased indifference overall

## Minor Parties

	Share	Average vote %	Change in Ave Vote since 2001	Candidates
SNP	1.5	17.7	-2.4	59
Plaid Cymru	0.6	12.6	-1.7	40
UKIP	2.3	2.8	+0.8	496
BNP	0.7	4.3	+1.7	119
Green	1.0	3.4	+0.8	183
Respect	0.3	6.8	+5.9	26
Veritas	0.1	1.3		33

*Who did Minor parties take votes from?*

*Respect:* Mainly Labour and the Liberal Democrats, but also the Conservatives.

*Greens:* Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

*UKIP:* Mainly the Tories but also Labour.

*BNP:* All three main parties.

- Also the BNP seems to be the only party that mobilized new voters and increased turnout.

# Candidate Characteristics

There are now 127 female MPs, 7 more than the previous record set in 1997.

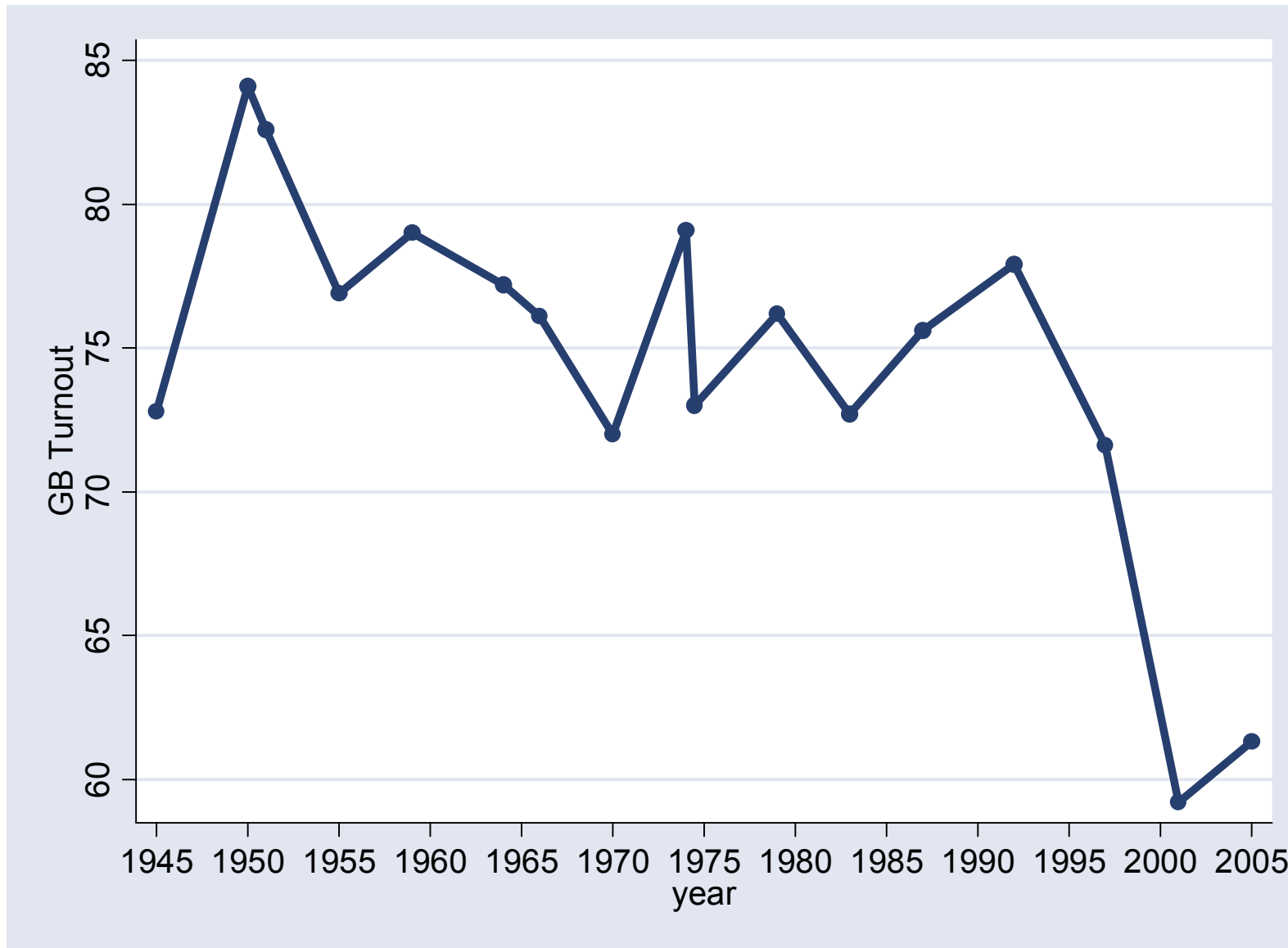
- However, in seats Labour were defending, new female Labour candidates did worse than new male ones, perhaps because of resentment against all-women short lists.

There are now 12 Labour and 2 Conservative ethnic minority MPs, up from the previous record of 12 in 2001, all of whom were Labour.

- However, ethnic minority Conservative candidates performed less well than other new Tory candidates.

In previous elections MPs defending a seat for the first time tended to do better than others from the same party. This remained true in 2005, but this time second time incumbents also outperformed older incumbents.

# Turnout



# Sources of Turnout Change

Turnout was up no more in marginal constituencies than elsewhere.

Younger people were even less likely to vote than in 2001, older people were more so

- Most likely due to cohort replacement

Turnout collapsed most heavily in working class areas in 2001 and failed to recover.

Postal vote registration was, at 12%, three times higher in 2001, but unrelated to turnout.

- postal voting is also unrelated to party performance.

# **The electoral system is biased towards Labour**

If Conservatives and Labour had the same share of the vote Labour would have a majority of 22.

If the Labour lead over the Conservatives were reversed Labour would still have 57 more seats and be short of an overall majority by just 16.

This is for three reasons:

1. Different seat sizes: Roughly 6200 electors more in each Tory seat compared with Labour seats.
2. Lower turnout in Labour seats (58.6%) than Conservative seats (65.2%).
3. A more efficient distribution of the vote for Labour.

The advantage Labour has is not simply the traditional exaggeration of the winner's lead, rather the system is biased.

## Further problems with the electoral system

Bias raises both questions of fairness, but the advocates of First-past-the-post have never been that concerned with fairness.

First-past-the-post is supposedly justified by

- maintenance of a two-party system
- majority government

It has certainly failed on the first account and likely to do so on the second

- anything between a 1 and 11.8 point lead by the Conservatives would produce a hung parliament.

## **Other Political Implications**

The UUP lost 5 of their 6 seats, confirming the DUP and Sinn Féin as the dominant parties in Northern Ireland.

The Liberal Democrats are now in second place in a third of Labour seats, previously it was only an eighth.

Conservatives are soon to have their fifth leader in nine years, but appear no closer to finding a way out of the electoral quagmire.

Labour won but Blair will have a rougher ride than before, Brownite's and other rebel groups hold the balance of power in the parliamentary Labour party.