

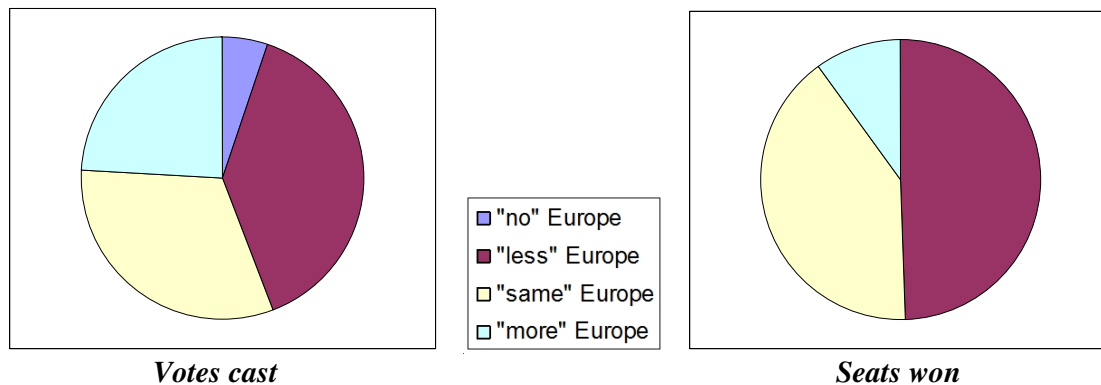
## The results of the general election 2010

The 2010 general election saw the installation of a coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats: no single party achieved a majority of seats in the House of Commons. What will this coalition arrangement mean for the future of British policy on Europe? And what else can we learn from the election results?

### 1. Balance between pro-Europeans and eurosceptics

As with the parties, the overall result of the election did not deliver a clear victory either for the pro-Europeans or their opponents.

#### 1.1 Votes cast and seats won in the House of Commons



The charts above show the balance of votes cast and seats won by the different parties, grouped according to the view of Europe expressed in their manifestos. (The terms “more”, “same”, “less” and “no” are a shorthand and not to be interpreted literally.) There were candidates within each party who dissented from their party’s official position, so one should not rely too much on the precise angle of each segment, but the broad outline is clear.

There is no majority either in the House of Commons or the public at large for withdrawal from the European Union, but there is no majority supporting further integration either. The governing coalition itself is an uneasy combination of pro-Europeans and eurosceptics.

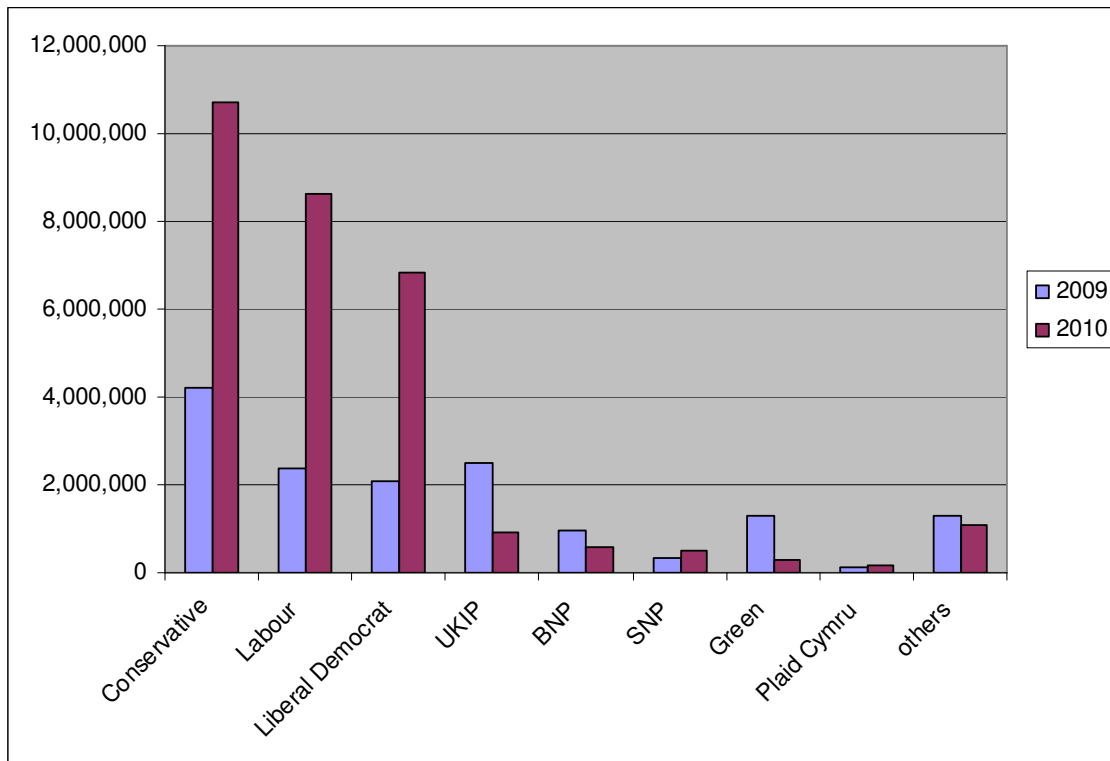
The UK risks being stuck in an awkward limbo, negotiating on each item of legislation as it comes forward, but unable to make a substantial contribution to the more profound questions regarding the future of the European Union.

## 2. Election turnout

As is usual, turnout was higher in the general election than in the European election: 65.1% (29,653,638 votes cast) compared with 34.5% (15,625,823 votes cast) in the 2009 European election.

It is generally accepted, by pro-Europeans as well as eurosceptics, that general elections matter much more than European elections, so it is unsurprising – and indeed perhaps appropriate – that general election turnouts are higher. Local election turnouts, too, are normally around 35%.

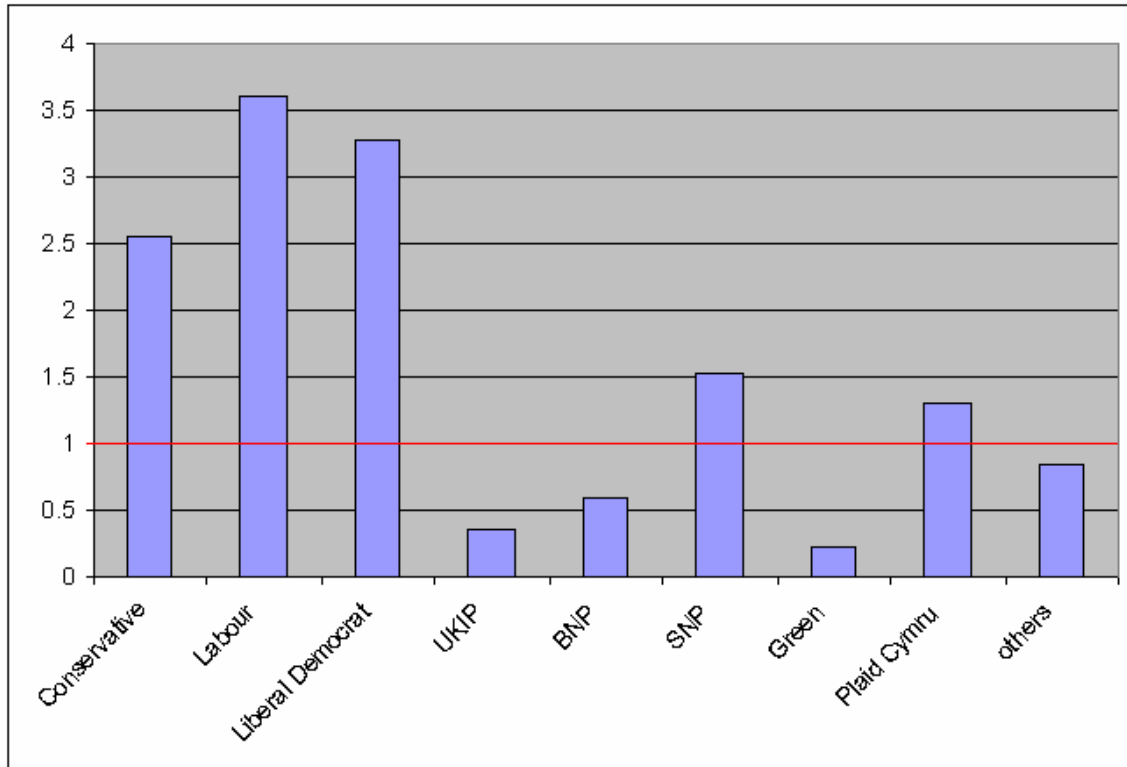
### 2.1 Votes won in the 2009 European and 2010 general elections



The increase in turnout did not benefit all parties equally. The chart above shows that the three largest parties, which get the overwhelming majority of media attention and which have by far the largest networks of activists on the ground, are the substantial beneficiaries of the increase in turnout.

### 2.2 Ratio of votes won in the 2010 general election to the 2009 European elections

Not only did the general election see the larger parties gain votes, but the smaller parties actually lost votes, notwithstanding the higher turnout. In the chart below, bars that reach above the red line represent parties that gained more votes in the general election than in the European election. Bars that fall short of the red line indicate parties that gained fewer votes.



The three main parties all gained votes, as did the two national parties in Scotland and Wales. All five of these are serious and widespread contenders for winning seats in Westminster, and capitalise on the personal leadership offered by their candidates. Smaller parties, by contrast, are rarely credible threats in First Past The Post constituencies (UKIP, the BNP and the Greens were taken seriously in only one seat each) and their voters were easily seduced away by other parties with their greater sense of electoral urgency. It might also be the case that, because the general election outcome matters more than the result of the European elections, votes are cast less on the basis of single issues and more for coherent and rounded proposals for government.

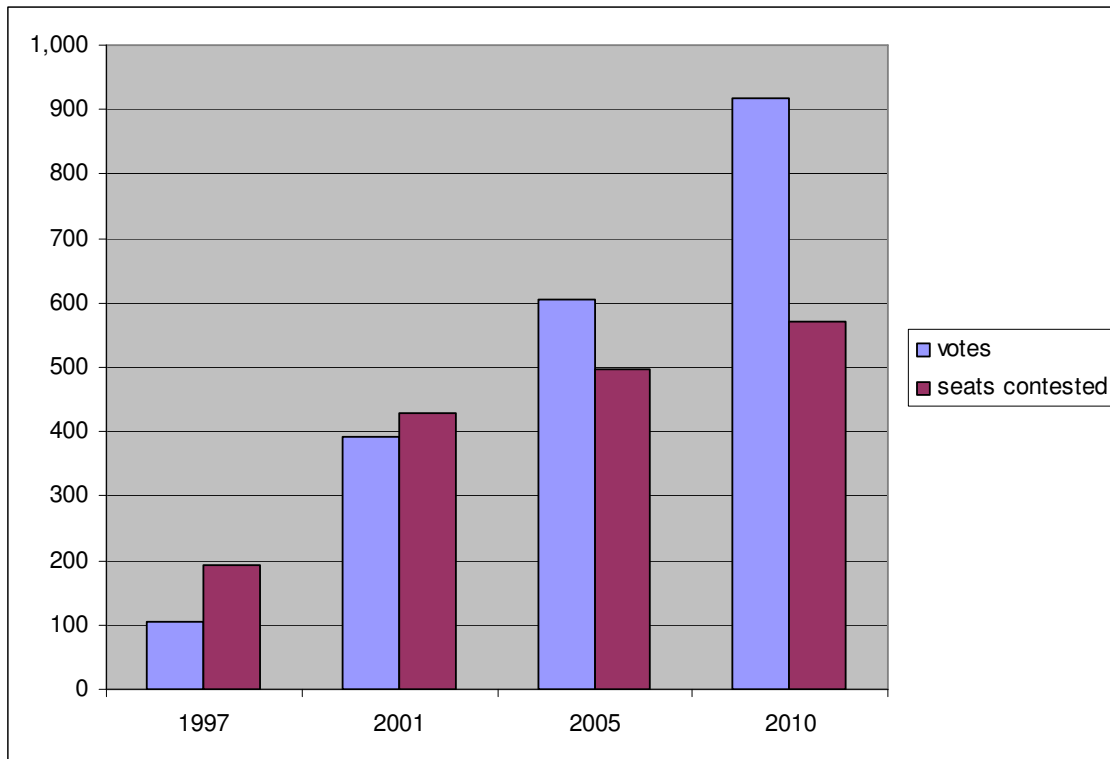
This note will now look at the consequences of this low ratio for the strategy of the two explicitly anti-European political parties, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the British National Party (BNP).

### **3. The performance of UKIP**

On the face of it, the 2010 general election result was UKIP's most successful ever. Overall, UKIP obtained 917,832 votes and a 3.1% vote share, an increase of 51% in the number of votes and a 29% increase in vote share compared with 2005.

#### **3.1 UKIP votes won and seats contested**

The growth in UKIP electoral activity since 1997 is shown in the chart below. There has been consistent growth in votes won and in the number of candidates. (The left-hand scale represents thousands of votes won or the actual number of seats contested.)



The rate of growth in the number of candidates has tailed off – there are 650 constituencies in total – as UKIP has reached close to saturation point. However, there is more to an election than nominating candidates and simply piling up votes thinly across the country. In 458 constituencies, UKIP failed to reach the 5% threshold for retaining its deposit. At £500 per deposit, this represents a total expenditure of £229,000. (By contrast, the Conservatives lost just two deposits, Labour five and the Liberal Democrats none.)

Furthermore, in 21 seats across the country won by Labour or the Liberal Democrats, the UKIP vote was greater than the majority of victory over the Conservatives. It is possible, therefore, that 43,235 UKIP voters in these 21 constituencies cost the Tories the election. If they had won those 21 more seats, they would have obtained an absolute majority in the House of Commons, rather than being forced into coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

Former Labour cabinet ministers Ed Balls and John Denham were among those who were re-elected thanks to UKIP, along with Lib Dem David Heath who is now deputy leader of the House of Commons. Furthermore, the Conservatives who did not win included noted eurosceptics such as David Heathcoat-Amory MP, who was not re-elected in Wells, and Annunziata Rees-Mogg, who failed to take Somerton & Frome from the Liberal Democrats.

The assumption underlying such an analysis is that enough UKIP voters would have voted Conservative instead had there been no UKIP candidate. In some parts of the country, during the campaign, the UKIP leader Lord Pearson indeed encouraged his likely voters to support the local Conservative candidate instead, and in others, where the Conservative was judged sufficiently eurosceptic, UKIP did not contest the seat at all. However, this approach was inconsistent and unclear and must ultimately be judged to have been unsuccessful.

What lessons should UKIP learn from this? If they adopt a policy of systematically standing down in favour of Conservatives who might win, they turn themselves into a pressure group rather than a political party and undermine the purpose of contesting any elections at all. But on the other hand, the more successful they become in winning votes, the more harm they are going to do to the prospect of achieving their own political objectives.

They talk of encouraging the Conservatives to adopt more eurosceptic policies in order to head off the UKIP threat. But why should the Conservatives do this? Is it not likely that they would lose more votes to Labour and the Liberal Democrats from their current voters who are deterred by UKIP's opposition to the EU than they would gain from UKIP itself? The people who argue that the Conservatives should go in the UKIP direction are either supporters of UKIP already or, in the Tory party, opponents of the EU in any case. Neither may be taken to be the best sources of advice on electoral strategy.

The Conservatives have a eurosceptic platform but one that falls short of wanting to leave the EU. In government, their approach is moderated by their coalition with the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrats won more than 6 million votes in the general election, while UKIP won less than 1 million. It would seem that Liberal Democrat voters would be a better target than UKIP voters in future, and that it would be an electoral mistake for the Conservatives to veer in the UKIP direction.

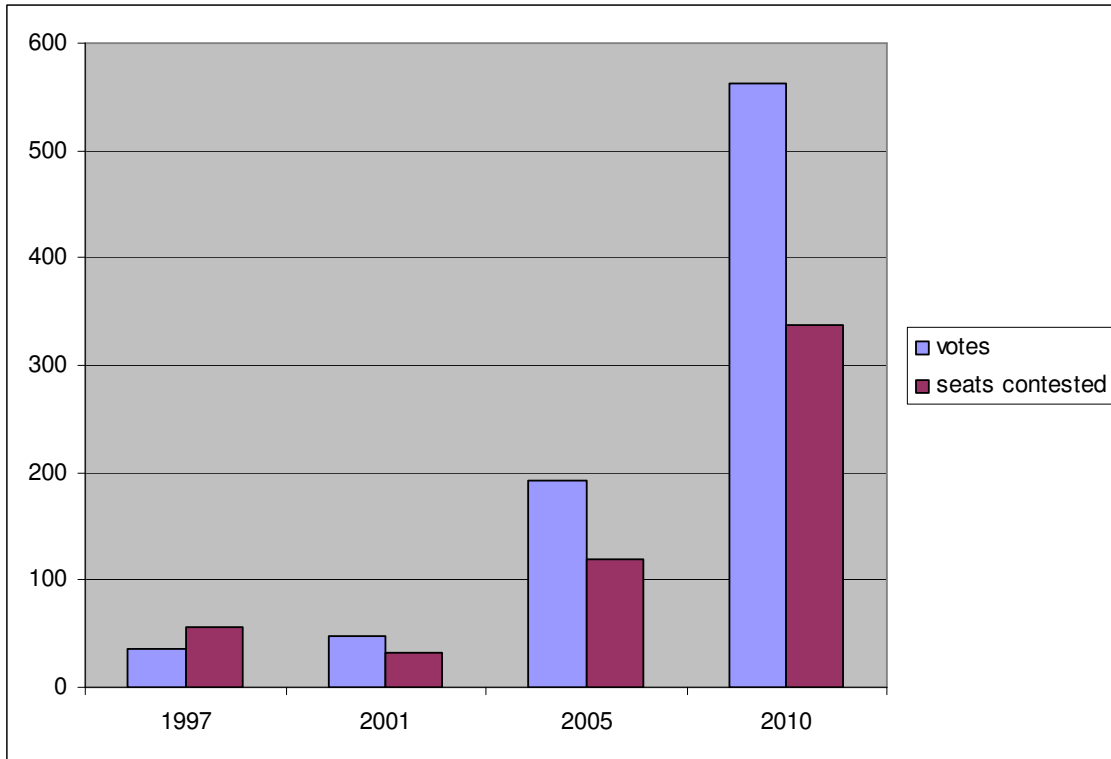
#### **4. The performance of the BNP**

As with UKIP, the 2010 general election was the BNP's best ever. They won 563,743 votes, or 1.9% of the total, almost trebling their votes and vote share compared with 2005. Unlike UKIP, which has almost total coverage of the country, the BNP was able to put forward many more candidates this time: 326 as opposed to 119 in 2005.

##### ***4.1 BNP votes won and seats contested***

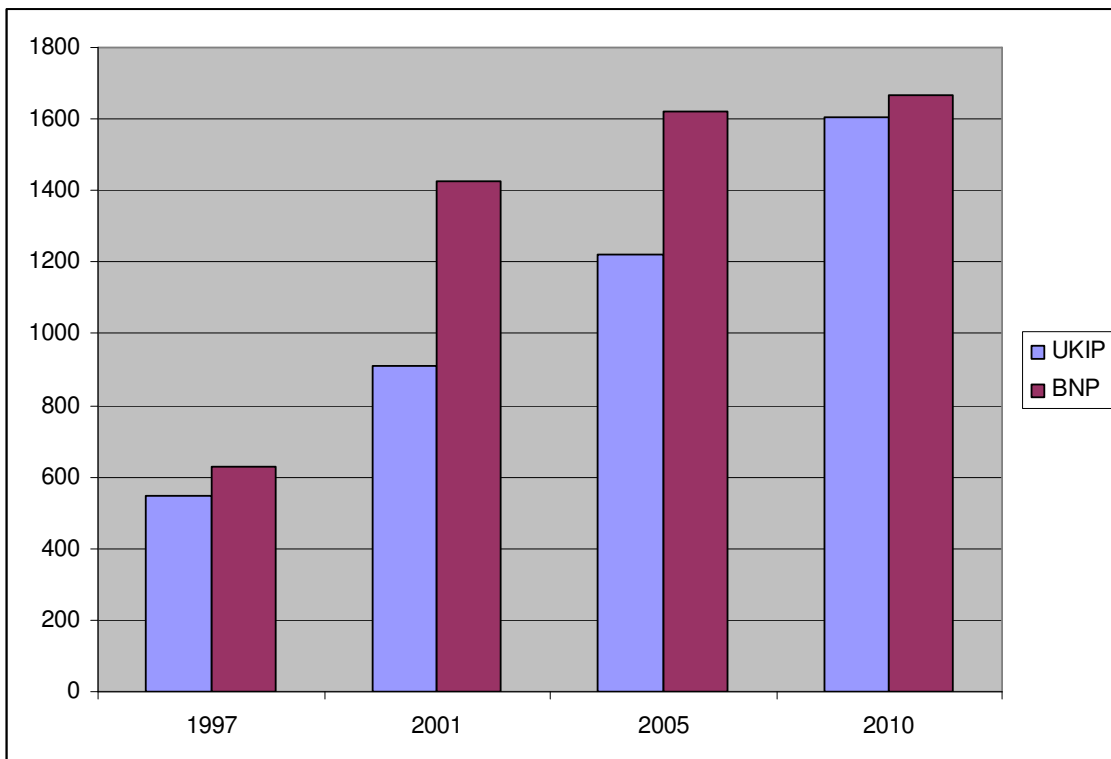
The chart below shows the rapid growth in BNP electoral activity during the last decade, increasing in both votes won and seats contested. (The left-hand scale represents thousands of votes won or the actual number of seats contested.)

Unlike UKIP, because their presence across the country is less extensive, it would be possible for the BNP to nominate substantially more candidates in future than they do now, if they have the members and the resources to sustain a larger election campaign.



#### 4.2 *Votes per seat contested*

The chart below compares UKIP and the BNP in terms of the average number of votes won in each seat that they contested.



It shows that the UKIP vote per candidate is consistently growing, whereas the rate of growth of the BNP vote per candidate is tailing off. Future growth in the BNP vote will come from contesting more seats, not from doing better in the seats in which they are already active. Why is this?

The reason is that, unlike UKIP, the BNP is firmly outside the democratic pale. UKIP's proposals may be foolish but they are not, unlike those of the BNP, generally considered to be offensive. Where the BNP is active, it provokes an opposite reaction.

In Barking, the seat where the BNP leader Nick Griffin stood and which he thought was his best prospect, his vote share did not rise as he had expected and in fact it fell by 10%. All 12 BNP councillors seeking re-election in the borough of Barking and Dagenham lost their seats. (Across the country as a whole, bear in mind, the BNP vote trebled. Had it trebled in Barking, Nick Griffin would now be an MP.)

This repeats the pattern seen in the European elections in 2009. Overall, the BNP vote went up by 16.8% and two BNP MEPs were elected. However, in the two regions where those MEPs were elected, the BNP vote actually went down by 3.5%. Their MEPs were elected because the Labour vote declined even faster.

## **5. Conclusion**

The electoral system used for British general elections means that it is not a simple matter to interpret the meaning of the votes cast. It is clear that opinion on Europe among the voters is divided, and that the centre of gravity is towards the eurosceptic end of the spectrum. However, it is not decisively so, which suggests that a coherent and active programme of pro-European politics could bring it back again.

This conviction is supported by the evidence that UKIP, as the standard bearer of anti-EU sentiment, remains a fringe party and cannot repeat the voting levels it gains in European elections in the general election when it matters more. Furthermore, UKIP's electoral strategy is turning out to be counterproductive.

Finally, the failure of the BNP to capitalise on its own successes is a tribute to the resistance it provokes. The British public does not take kindly to racism in its midst; the democratic spirit remains.