

Additional Member System (AMS)

Advantages of AMS

AMS is fairer than FPTP because the seats allocated to each party more accurately reflect the share of votes they received. Nevertheless, the final result is not completely fair because the majority (73) of MSPs are still chosen by FPTP and the remaining 56 list MPs do not balance things up with complete accuracy. For example, in 2007 the SNP got only 32% of the votes cast but ended up with 37% of the MSPs which was just enough to gain control. Meanwhile, the Greens received almost 4% of the votes cast but only 1.6% of the MSPs. AMS is much fairer but not completely fair.

Small parties benefit from AMS because they can gain a few MSPs without needing a large share of the votes. This brings different views to Parliament such as those of The Greens and the Scottish Socialists. However, some believe the smaller parties may be able to bring a bigger influence than they should because they may be given more media attention than they deserve for such a small number of MSPs.

Every vote counts in contrast to FPTP where the votes for candidates who don't win are completely wasted. Under AMS the regional votes are reallocated when the 56 regional MSPs are selected so every voter can feel s/he is making some impact.

Moderate government may be more likely because AMS means an overall majority for a single party is unlikely. Hung parliaments make it more likely that two parties will form a coalition to gain power (e.g. the Scottish Parliament in 1999 & 2003 produced a coalition govt of Lab & Lib Dems). This means parties must compromise on policies to reach agreement and get legislation through parliament so moderate policies are more likely. The Lab / Lib Dem coalition worked fairly well for 8 years. After 2007, the SNP formed a minority govt with only one more MSP than the Labour Party. It has also survived fairly well by introducing policies which are reasonably moderate because it knows more extreme policies would simply be voted down by the other parties.

On the other hand, some commentators feel that coalitions are not so much moderate governments as *weak* governments, unable to take the strong decisions a country may need in case it forces the coalition to collapse. Moreover, in some circumstances a coalition could give too power to small parties. For example, the Lib Dems formed part of the government in 1997 & 2003. In such circumstances small parties can make significant demands as part of the deal despite the fact that very few people voted for them.

AMS may help **to increase the number MSPs from minority groups** in society. For example, parties may be tempted to choose white middle-class men in Constituency candidates because history suggests they do well in such elections. However, because the Regional List ballot paper does not contain all the names on a party's list, it may make it easier to include people from groups who are under-represented in parliament – e.g. women, ethnic minorities, disabled people, etc.