

Compass

A Guide to Progressive Alliances



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info@compassonline.org.uk
<https://www.compassonline.org.uk>

A Progressive Alliance?

We need to transform our politics to transform our society. Our broken first-past-the-post voting system pits progressives against each other and hard-wires tribal behaviours into our political culture. The Progressive Alliance is the essential first step out of this vicious circle. It's an act of rebellion against the voting system and a statement of intent to form a progressive coalition Government.

It's obvious to most voters that Britain's progressives have way more in common than divides them. Meanwhile, the Conservatives are benefitting from progressive parties competing with each other. We can only break this damaging pattern by working together in places where the vote is tight, by forming an alliance of progressives.

The Progressive Alliance only needs to win one general election. The resulting progressive Government must then put in place a proportional voting system so that at the next election, voters everywhere can follow their hearts and know that their vote counts.

What happened in 2017

At the 2017 general election, the Progressive Alliance (PA) helped to beat the odds and instead of a landslide victory, Theresa May's Conservatives lost their majority in Parliament. Results analysis suggests that the PA made a difference in dozens of seats.

This remarkable outcome was thanks to the wisdom and generosity of those local parties and candidates across the country who were brave enough to put the national interest before the interest of their own parties.

Faced with our unfair first-past-the-post voting system, they stood aside for and/or endorsed a fellow progressive candidate in their constituencies. By doing so, they helped to unite the progressive vote in marginal seats, and in many places the result was victory over the Tories.

By working together, we succeeded in denying the Conservatives a majority. Yet, we failed to deliver a progressive Government. That's a real tragedy, considering that there were more than 60 constituencies where a Tory MP was elected despite the majority of voters backing progressive candidates. We must do better this time.

Our challenge today

We've had a glimpse of what our country and our politics look like when Boris Johnson and his entourage occupy 10 Downing Street. They will stop at nothing to get to long-term power.

Their campaign will reflect this. It will seek to exploit voters' sentiments about the Brexit chaos in Westminster and our divided nation. They may team up with Farage and the rest of the far-right where they can. And if we progressives fail to form a united opposition, our FPTP voting system will hand them the win - and five years of power.

What local political parties and their activists can do

Whether it is to protect a strong progressive MP from a right-wing challenge, or to defeat a right-wing incumbent, in many constituencies the result may depend on whether the progressive parties are able to come to an understanding. Below we set out how parties and their activists could make an alliance happen.

1. Open the dialogue

It often starts with a simple conversation - coming together as people, not as parties. Focus on shared hopes and fears and discover how much you have in common - especially when contrasting it to Johnson's Regressive Alliance. Can you come together around a set of progressive policies like these, based on the Progressive Charter that the South West Surrey PA proposes:

- # An ambitious Green New Deal to tackle the Climate Emergency
- # A people-led process for democratic renewal including a proportional voting system
- # Ending austerity and redressing the economic inequalities in our society
- # Social & environmental justice policies based on human rights and internationalism
- # Opposing the Government's Brexit; bringing people back into the conversation.

2. Explore how you can work together

Most progressive voters want parties to work together. For political activists, it's often less easy. That's why it's important that when building alliances, you make sure that there's something in it for everyone involved. There are many ways you could make that happen - as PAs in [Richmond-upon-Thames](#) and elsewhere have demonstrated.

Gauge what might work for your constituency. Now that the deadline for standing aside has passed, for greatest impact, you might want to agree a progressive alliance through a public endorsement, i.e. one candidate publicly telling their supporters to vote for another, better-placed candidate. If that's out of reach, then see if you can agree to campaign tactically, with each party's activists going to places where their party can make the greatest difference, instead of winning a few votes locally but stopping a progressive party winning.

What you can do to build and maintain a successful alliance:

- Make your alliance equitable: work hard to find a way to reciprocate the sacrifices others are prepared to make. E.g. other nearby constituencies, upcoming local or regional elections, policy commitments;
- If you receive other candidates' endorsements, thank them in public when the alliance is announced, and again if and when you get elected;
- Commit to a shared policy pledge agreed by local progressives and honour it;
- Once the election is over, keep involving the progressives who supported you in your work and consult them on important decisions.

If it is problematic for your party to agree a public endorsement in your constituency, while you know that another progressive party has a better chance, you could consider the following, with or without reciprocal arrangements:

- Publicly calling for your fellow members and supporters to campaign in a different (named) constituency where they are needed to help beat the Tories;

- Allocating a zero budget to the campaign in your constituency and not putting out any leaflets to promote your party's general election candidate;
- In your constituency, responding positively to the best-placed progressive candidate in local media and on social media, and encouraging other members of your local party to do the same.

3. Negotiate and agree a deal

Especially in the case of a stand-aside or endorsement, it's important to end up with an agreement that is as detailed and explicit as possible - understood by all. It does not need to be public, but you will need an agreed message to voters and the press about your collaboration.

Of course an alliance is more than just a deal. It's stepping into a new way of doing politics - one where our common values, not our differences, are central. It's worth highlighting this when you talk about the alliance, whether it's to the press or to fellow activists in your party. Chances of success - and future successes for everyone involved - are greater if it's widely recognised that the alliance shows parties shedding their habits for the greater good, not a simple transaction to benefit their narrow interests.

4. Make it last

There is more to be gained from an alliance than a one-off electoral advantage. It can be the start of a meaningful collaboration, which in turn can help you to build a stronger political base, as progressive alliances including in South West Surrey - where a PA took control of the district council from the Tories - have proven in recent years.

What you can do if you are not in a political party

Building progressive alliances is not uniquely the territory of political parties and their activists. Others can play vital roles in bringing parties and/or voters together.

It is often with the help of local non-party campaigners that alliances are achieved. Non-party campaigners don't have to consider the risk of disciplinary action against them from their parties, and as such they can take pressure away from party activists who may be keen to work together, but concerned about backlash from their parties.

Here are some of the things you can do locally as a non-party member:

- If a progressive alliance has been formed, join its campaign;
- Join a cross-party campaign organisation (e.g. Compass, Campaign Together);
- Work with others to persuade political parties to form an alliance;
- Offer your skills to help deepen and strengthen the alliance.

If you want to help establish a PA where there isn't one yet, it's vital to take a collaborative approach. Dialogue is the key to success. Talk to people to find out what's happening already and how you (or your organisation) can get involved. If political parties aren't on board yet, how can you get them to the table? As non-party campaigners, what can you offer in terms of skills and support? Have you got relevant connections elsewhere? Etc.

If political parties in your local area aren't keen to form a PA, and there's no chance of getting them over the line, consider whether you can support a PA campaign in a different constituency. It's not worth

getting frustrated by others' tribalism in one place if you can be part of an energetic, grown-up campaign in another.

Connecting the dots

Back in 2017, hearing about alliances that were happening across the country inspired many more people to be part of the Progressive Alliance. It's important to remember that it's more than a mechanism to defeat FPTP and the Tories: it's a nationwide collective effort for a new way of doing politics.

That's a story that needs telling - by different voices from different places, throughout the campaign. Whether you've got a full-blown local progressive alliance, or you're joining a cross-party team of campaigners to help a progressive candidate to oust an incumbent Conservative, share your story where you can. And tell people *why* you're doing what you're doing. [Tell us too](#) - so that we can tell those who are running similar campaigns many miles away.

We want to help foster connections between Progressive Alliance candidates too - the successful ones will carry the responsibility to promote a new, cross-party, pluralist politics both in Westminster and back in their constituencies. Not just as individual MPs, but as a strong collective operating across tribal boundaries to open up the political space for meaningful democratic progress.

Further reading

- Barry Langford's book [All together now](#) giving the inside story of the 2017 Progressive Alliance campaign run by Compass;
- For a fantastic local perspective on Progressive Alliances, the key players in the South West Surrey constituency have produced the book [A new way of doing politics](#);
- If you're interested in a Progressive Alliance focused on stopping Brexit, there's this [guide from Best for Britain](#).

Contact

Have you got further questions about Progressive Alliances? Do you need help making a Progressive Alliance happen where you live? Please contact Remco at Compass by email: remco@compassonline.org.uk.