

Report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System: Volume 2

Submissions and correspondence from Members of Parliament

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STV PLUS

By Donald Gorrie MP

I strongly favour STV because it gives the choice to the voters rather than to the national or local party machine.

One objection to STV is that it may sometimes not be closely proportional. Another is that, to make it as proportional as possible can lead to the multi-member constituencies being made so large that they lose the local representative aspect.

The STV Plus system counters these two arguments. The multi-member system aims to combine the merits of the Single Transferable Vote and Additional Member systems of voting.

The usual STV system of multi-member seats is supplemented by an Additional Member system. The number of additional members needed to make the results of the STV election accurately proportional between parties will be small, judging by an analysis of elections in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta and Tasmania.

Because the goal of proportionality between parties is achieved by the small number of additional MPs, the individual STV multi-member constituencies can be smaller than would be needed to provide proportionality on their own. The constituencies in cities and conurbations could be of 4, 5 or 6 members and still make up a coherent and accessible community. In the rural areas, constituencies of 2 or 3 members would provide some of the benefits of the STV system, but would not be spread so widely that the voters did not feel that they enjoyed local representation. In Orkney and Shetland, the Western Isles and other very sparsely populated areas, a single member elected by the alternative Vote might be preferred.

The voters would vote in multi-member constituencies, using the Single Transferable Vote System. This would combine voter choice, local accountability and a high degree of proportionality in the 2 to 6 member seats. To make the result completely proportional and ensure the representation of all parties gaining more than the agreed minimum percentage of votes (usually 5%), the Additional Member system would be used to top up any party whose number of MPs was below its fair share.

The totals of First Preference votes for candidates of each party would be used to determine each party's share of MPs. In calculating a party's fair share of MPs, the percentage of the MPs elected from the whole country is taken, then the Parties are allocated enough additional MPs to make their total representation up to their total percentage of the vote. If a party's percentage of MPs is higher than its percentage of the first preference vote, it keeps its additional MPs as a reward for having more transferred votes. The candidates to be chosen as those topping up a party's total to the correct figure would be those not elected for a constituency, who had gained the highest final total of votes after transfers from other candidates. So all the MPs would be chosen by the voters and not by a party list.

To help sparsely populated rural areas and islands to have a greater say in Parliament this system could deliberately allocate them more MPs than their population strictly deserves.

The multi-member seats ensure that these rural MPs will come from a variety of parties. If this favouring of the less populated areas alters the party balance, this will be corrected by the Additional Members. So these areas are given a stronger voice without upsetting the parties' fair share of MPs in the country as a whole.

STV IN IRELAND

A study of eight recent general elections in the Republic of Ireland shows only 8 occasions in which a party would have needed a top up of additional members, if our proposed system had been operating. In all 8 elections Fianna Fail, the largest party, won a higher percentage of seats than of first preference votes. The second party, Fine Gael, only once would have needed a top up of 2 members in 1977. Labour, the third or fourth largest party, would have qualified for a top up in 4 of the 8 elections – needing 6 additional members (18 up to 24) in 1969, 1 in 1977, 1 in 1981 and 1 in 1987. The Progressive Democrats would qualify for a top up in both the elections they contested, with 6 additional members (14 up to 20) in 1987 and 3 in 1989. The total number of added MPs over the 8 elections would have formed less than 2% of the total number of MPs. This illustrates the potentially high proportionality of STV.

It should be noted, that under STV, Irish parties can gain representation with well under 5% of the overall vote. The Greens gained one seat in 1989, with 1.5% of the overall vote. In 1987 the Workers Party gained 4 seats with 3.8% of the vote. Independents and other small groups averaged 4 seats in each election. The possibilities of election by attracting many transferred votes from other elected or eliminated candidates are illustrated by one Irish MP, elected in a 5-member seat, who started with only 8.8% of the first preference vote.

The Irish elections of 1969 and 1973 illustrate the power STV gives the voter if they choose to support a second choice party after they have voted for all the candidates of their first choice party. In 1973 there was an electoral agreement between Fine Gael and Labour to go for a coalition. In 1969 there had been no such agreement. The figures for 8 constituencies show how the voters responded.

Votes from last surviving Fine Gael/Labour candidate:

	<u>1969</u>	<u>1973</u>
Transferred to 1973 partner	30%	80%
Transferred to 1973 opponents	15%	9%
Not transferred	55%	11%

STV IN OTHER COUNTRIES

In Malta STV has been used for 60 years. There are only two parties. At only one election did the party with fewer votes gain more seats. The additional members proposed in our system would have corrected that anomaly.

The Northern Ireland Convention election of 1975 was run under STV. The 78 representatives of 5 parties were elected in close proportion to the first preference votes. Only 2 parties would have qualified for one additional member each under our system.

Tasmania has used STV for years with good proportional results, with one of the smaller parties sometimes qualifying for one top up member under our proposed additional member system. In the 1986 election the party totals within the 35-member Parliament remained as before, but the voters replaced 17 of them with new representatives using their power to choose between candidates of the same party.

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