

# the X-Change guide to voting reform

## So how does our voting system work at the moment?

Different countries have different voting systems which help us decide who governs and represents us. Confusingly ours is called First-Past-The-Post but it doesn't mean the first candidate to get a certain number of votes wins. It seems simple, but causes lots of problems.



## So what's wrong with it?

### It's not modern!

First-Past-The-Post, apart from sounding rather odd, grew out of old class politics in the last millennium. Nowadays, we're becoming interested in political issues, but we're not necessarily comfortable voting for any of the three main parties. We might have views on environmental issues that lead us to one party, but conflicting ideas about health, welfare that suggest another party. Our current system isn't sophisticated enough for us to express how we feel about different issues.

### It's not Democratic!

It puts voters off, or encourages them to cast 'negative votes', voting against the candidate they dislike the least, rather than the one they like the most.

Because the number of votes doesn't lead directly to the number of seats a party gets in Parliament, Labour won 35.2% of the votes in the 2005 General Election, but got 55.1% of the seats! Given that only 61% of the country actually voted that means that only 1 in 5 people registered to vote actually got the Government they wanted!

### It isn't fair to voters!

Imagine a constituency where support for the three main parties is roughly the same. Say the conservative party has just 1% more votes than the other parties. Because they don't need to get more than half of the votes, they win the seat but 65% of the people in the constituency didn't vote for them! Effectively, their votes are wasted, and they needn't have bothered wasting time going to vote.

### It's rubbish!

Turn over to see how we can make things better

### There's no voter choice!

You don't get a great deal of choice. You have one vote to use, and if you're in an area that traditionally elects MPs from a party you don't agree with, your vote may well not count.

Similarly, you might think one of your local candidates would be an excellent MP, but don't think his or her party would be good to govern the country!

### Constituencies...

Britain is split up into 646 constituencies, such as Aylesbury, St.Albans, Southwark etc. If they register to vote (which is free) people over 18 can vote for their MP in the constituency in which they live.

### Electoral Borders

People don't always stay in one place, but on average constituencies contain about 70,000 people. A special authority called the Boundary Commission exists to try to make sure constituencies are as similar in size as possible. However, they are always trying to catch up with the changes in population, so sometimes some constituencies are quite different sizes.

### Electing MPs...

In every constituency on election day, each voter gets one vote, and puts a mark next to the name of the candidate that he or she likes the best. The candidate with the most votes wins the seat in that constituency and becomes the Member of Parliament for that area. The party which has the most MPs usually forms the government until the next general election, it doesn't matter if they don't have the support of the majority of people in Britain.

# change for the better

So we've got problems with our voting system, and it's causing problems with our democracy.

We want to change it for a system that encourages fairness and choice for voters. We campaign for the Single Transferable Vote.

**The Single Transferable Vote**  
STV is a completely different system, it's more modern and its more sophisticated.

- You get to vote preferentially, for your 1<sup>st</sup> choice, 2<sup>nd</sup> choice, 3<sup>rd</sup> and so on
- Constituencies are much bigger meaning you vote for a group of 3 or 4 MPs
- This means one party doesn't dominate the area
- Your vote goes further and doesn't get wasted

Plus it's been tried and tested in Northern Ireland!

## How is it more democratic?

- It puts power in the hands of the voters.
- It keeps MPs linked to the people who voted for them. Most voters can identify an MP that they personally helped to elect and can feel affinity with. Such a personal link also increases accountability.
- It makes parliament reflect the views of the voters.
- Only a party or coalition of parties, voted for by more than half of the electorate could form a government. Any changes would have to be backed by a majority since public opinion is reflected fairly in elections under STV. This is far more important than the idea that a government should be formed by only one political party.
- Voters get to express their opinions effectively. They can choose between candidates within parties, demonstrating support for different wings of the party.
- Voters can also express preferences between the abilities or other attributes, of individual candidates.
- It's easy to use!
- There's no need for tactical voting. Voters can cast a positive vote and know that their vote will not be wasted whatever their choice is.
- It produces governments that are strong and stable because they are founded on the support of at least half the electorate.

### DEMOCRACY SHOPPING LIST

- ENCOURAGES POLITICIANS TO WORK TOGETHER
- HELPS GIVE EVERYONE A VOICE
- MEANS MORE VOTER CHOICE