
A Brief Submitted in Support of a New Voting System in Federal Elections: The Single Transferable Vote

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Summary

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a form of proportional representation which produces a Parliament with local representation and the direct election of individual candidates. Each constituency sends multiple Members of Parliament (MPs) that represent each constituencies diverse myriad of opinions to parliament.

Section A: Background and Summary of how STV is structured

Section B: Pro's and Cons of STV in Canada

Section C: How the STV System Satisfies the 5 Criteria Specified in the Parliamentary Order Paper

Section D: The STV System in Practice

Section C: Conclusion

Section A: Background and Summary

The Single Transferable Vote is a preferential voting system. At the polling station, voters put numbers next to candidates in order of preference, and to get elected, candidates need to reach a set share of the votes, determined by the number of seats to be filled.

Each constituent gets one vote, which can be transferred from their first-preference to their second-preference. As a voter whose first vote in a federal election was a strategic one, this means a lot. If the voter's preferred candidate has no chance of being elected or has reached the vote quota already, your vote is transferred to your second choice candidate in accordance with your ranking. STV removes the issue of strategic voting because it ensures that very few votes are wasted, unlike First Past the Post in which only a small number of votes are needed to contribute to a majority result.

The biggest foreseeable issue with STV is understanding how votes are counted. While the ballot may be simple to figure out, how it is put to use may seem a little complicated. With STV, a voter has a single vote that is initially allocated to their most preferred candidate and, as the count proceeds and candidates are either elected or eliminated. Votes that are not used towards the election of a candidate, are filtered through remaining

candidates based on their ballot rankings. This transfer is proportional to any surplus or discarded votes.. However the exact method of reapportioning votes can vary, the biggest issue of debate is distributing the surplus votes, which ones get to have their second choice counted as well. I would suggest to survey all of the votes cast for the candidate, find which percent voted for each candidate as their second choice and divide the surplus according to these percentages. The system provides approximately proportional representation, and enables votes to be cast for individual candidates rather than for parties.

Another calculation to be done is the minimum number of votes to be elected. A number of different quota methods can be used; the most common is the *Droop Quota* where the quota is an integer. When the quota is not an integer it is rounded down; that is, its fractional part is discarded. The Droop quota is an extension of requiring a 50% + 1 majority in single winner elections. For example, at most 3 people can have 25% + 1 in 3 winner elections, 9 can have 10% + 1 in 9 winner elections, and so on.

Section B: Pros and Cons of STV

- There is no need for tactical voting. As a generation coming out of a tactical vote election, this change is a defining feature.
- Fewer votes are 'wasted' (i.e. cast for losing candidates or unnecessarily cast for the winner) under STV. This means that most voters can identify a representative that they personally helped to elect. Such a link in turn increases a representative's accountability.
- STV offers voters a variety of representatives to approach with their concerns post-election, rather than just one, who may not always be in line with a voter's views.
- With STV and multi-member constituencies, parties have a powerful electoral incentive to present a balanced team of candidates in order to maximize the number of higher preferences that would go to their sponsored candidates. This helps the advancement of women and ethnic-minorities attempting to run as well
- By encouraging candidates to seek first-, as well as lower-preference votes, the efficacy of negative campaigning is greatly diminished within the riding.

Cons

- The process of counting the results takes longer under STV, meaning that results cannot usually be declared on the same night as the vote took place. However this can be combatted with electronic ballot paper scanners.
- In sparsely populated areas, such as the Territories, STV could lead to very large constituencies.
- A voting system that allows voters to rank candidates is prone to so-called 'Donkey voting', where voters vote for candidates in the order they appear on the ballot. Names on ballot

papers would have to be batch printed using a method known as Robson Rotation to avoid this issue.

- In large multi-member constituencies, ballot papers can get rather somewhat long and confusing.

Section C: How the STV System Satisfies the 5 Criteria Specified in the Parliamentary Order Paper

1. Effectiveness and Legitimacy. *Summarizing briefly, any new system should increase confidence among Canadians that “their democratic will, as expressed by their votes, will be fairly translated” and the system “strengthens the link between voter intention and the election of representatives.”*
 - The STV system ensures confidence and democratic will by increasing the degree to which a vote is used. Because voters are ranking their choices, even if their first pick does not get elected, their second choice will receive the reapportioned vote, so the voter does not feel that their vote was ‘wasted’. Furthermore, this feeling of a vote going to good use will make the voter feel more connected to their representative, especially if they feel in part responsible for electing them.
2. Engagement. *The new system should “encourage voting, ... foster greater civility and collaboration in politics,” and “offer opportunities for inclusion of underrepresented groups in the political process.”*
 - The STV system encourages voting and engagement by taking away the apathy of disenfranchised voters. Because their vote has a higher chance of counting, voters will be more likely to participate.
3. Accessibility and Inclusiveness. *The new system should “avoid undue complexity in the voting process.”*
 - The ballot system for STV is very simple, you just number your candidates by preference.
4. Integrity
 - The system has been used in practice before as discussed in the next section.
5. Local Representation
 - The STV system upholds the riding system so local representation will be maintained.

Section D: STV in Practice

An example of STV being put to use is in Australia, there they use two forms of STV, usually referred to within Australia as *Hare-Clark Proportional Representation* and *Group-Voting Proportional Representation*. Both systems require voters to rank several, or all, of the candidates on the ballot, reducing or eliminating the possibility of exhausted votes.

The Hare-Clark System is currently used in Tasmania's House of Assembly and the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly. This is essentially the STV system using

the Droop quota, but candidates' placements on the ballot, within the column for each party, are randomized by Robson Rotation rather than alphabetical.

The Group-Voting or Ticket-Voting system is used in the Australian Senate and the Legislative Councils of New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. The votes are counted in the basically same way as under Hare-Clark, but when casting votes the voters have an option to select one single group on the voting ticket instead of numbering individual candidates below the line. Groups of candidates may each pre-register one ranked list of all the candidates and the votes above the line for each ticket are deemed to have numbered the candidates in the order pre-specified on the team's list.

Each form has its pros and cons. The Hare-Clark system with Robson Rotation is advocated on the grounds that the effect of 'donkey voting' is reduced because of the randomized ordering, and the absence of the group voting tickets creates more personal accountability. However the alternative system is advocated on the grounds that informal voting (spoiled ballots) is reduced because only one number need be written. Although it greatly increases the potential for tactics and negative campaigning by parties as they have direct control of a large percentage of the vote. In the Australian Senate elections, nearly 95% of voters use the group voting tickets instead of ranking their own preferences. As a result, the informal rate reduced from around 10 percent, to around three percent.

Section E: Conclusion

The STV system, in the opinion of this youth voter, is the most logical choice for the next Canadian federal election. STV removes tactical voting and can decrease apathy among voters who feel as if their vote is "wasted" because of a party's dominance within their riding. STV with the group vote option also encourages parties to provide well balanced parties which helps combat the issue of lack of minority representation in the House of Commons. The Single Transferrable Vote has proven it's efficacy in Australia and has proven itself to be a legitimate and healthy choice for Canadians who want their voice to be heard.