

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

For more detailed information about STV:

- **An introduction and rationale**
- **A model election**
- **Electing the Northern Ireland Assembly**
- **How to conduct an election by the Single Transferable Vote**
- **eSTV - an STV counting program**

How the System Works:

Each constituency would elect between 3 and 5 MPs depending on its size. Voters rank the candidates, putting a '1' for their favourite, a '2' for the next, and so on. If the voter's first choice candidate does not need their vote, either because he or she is elected without it, or because he or she has too few votes to be elected, then the vote is transferred to the voter's second choice candidate, and so on.

In this way, most of the votes help to elect a candidate and far fewer votes are wasted. An important feature of STV is that voters can choose between candidates both of their own and of other parties, and can even select candidates for reasons other than party affiliation. Thus, a voter, wishing for more women MPs could vote for a woman from their own party and then all other women candidates, whatever party they stand for.

The system is used:

in the Australian Senate, the Republic of Ireland, Tasmania, Malta and Northern Ireland for local elections and elections to the European Parliament.

Arguments used in favour:

STV does more than other systems to guarantee that everyone gets their views represented in parliament and that they have a say in what is done by their elected representatives. STV is the best option for:

- Putting the power in the hands of the voters.
- Keeping MPs linked to the people who voted for them. Most voters can identify a representative that they personally helped to elect and can feel affinity with. Such a personal link also increases accountability.
- Making parliament reflect the views of the voters.
- Only a party or coalition of parties, who could attract more than 50% 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 that a government should be formed by only one political party.
- It enables the voters to express opinions effectively. Voters 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 is simple for voters to use.
- There is 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 majority support of the electorate.

Weaknesses:

- The system does not produce such accuracy in proportional representation of parties as the party list or additional member systems.
- It breaks the link between *an individual* MP and his or her constituency.
- Constituencies would be 3-5 times larger than they are now but with 3-5 MPs.
- MPs may have to spend an excessive amount of time dealing with constituency problems and neglect the broader issues.
- There are critics who say that this system could lead to permanent coalition governments, but this would only happen if the voters as a whole want it.
- It is disliked by politicians, since it would remove power from them and give it to the electors, and many MPs with safe seats would lose the security they feel now.

Answering the Common Arguments Against STV

It could destroy the link between MPs and the constituents

Under STV, the constituency link is retained, albeit between several MPs and an enlarged constituency. The accountability of MPs to their constituencies is actually increased in that, unlike the current single-member constituencies, no individual MP has a safe seat. Due to the reduction in security of tenure brought about by STV, all MPs will need to win their seats on merit. Voters also tend to feel a natural link with the whole of Leeds, for example, rather than an allegiance to Leeds North or Leeds Central. They may prefer to have real influence with the MPs representing the whole of the city, rather than hold one MP responsible for their sector. The idea of working together, as a team with other representatives in the area is the norm for local government, where working together for a local ward, is often seen as advantageous.

STV could cause internal party rifts

In most cases, party solidarity and loyalty will inhibit individualistic campaigning, and even if this were to happen, a party could exclude a future ticket to a recalcitrant candidate. There is intra-party competition in every election system. With First-Past-The-Post, it is internalised within the selection and re-selection process; with Party Lists, it becomes a permanent internal competition for a high place on the list. In order to maximise its total support in a multi-member constituency; a party is likely to put up a balanced team of candidates. Under STV all existing MPs can stand for election, and may have an advantage in being better known than their new colleagues.

MPs could become bogged down in casework.

There is no evidence in Britain that local casework-based candidates poll better than national names, often voters like to be represented by national names who may have little day to day contact with the constituency.

The ballot papers would be too complicated for the public too understand.

Electors are perfectly able to cope with STV ballot papers. The first Northern Ireland Assembly election under STV in 1973, which produced a 70% turnout, is a good example. The voters elected representatives from both sides of the community in every constituency.