

Appendix: Some voting scenarios to think about

Scenario 1

In an election to select 1 representative for a constituency, there are 3 candidates and 100 voters. Each voter casts one vote, as follows:

- Red Party 350
- Pink Party 250
- Blue Party 400

The Blue Party has the biggest pile of votes, so it wins.

The Pink Party is very similar to the Red Party and attracts support from similar people.

Was this election fair? Who should have won?

Scenario 2

In an election (say at local government level) to select 3 representatives for a ward, there are 6 candidates - 3 from the Blue Party and 3 from the Red Party - and 1000 voters. Each voter casts 3 votes, as follows:

- Red Party 1st candidate (Mrs Aardvark) 490
- Red Party 2nd candidate (Mr Meerkat) 400
- Red Party 3rd candidate (Mr Zebra) 310
- Blue Party 1st candidate (Mr Greedy) 690
- Blue Party 2nd candidate (Mr Happy) 600
- Blue Party 3rd candidate (Miss Sunshine) 510

The Blue Party wins all three seats - more people backed its slate than the Red slate.

It was close between Blue candidate Sunshine and Red candidate Aardvark though - if Aardvark had edged out Sunshine for the third seat, would that have been a more equitable outcome?

Why do you think some candidates from the same party did slightly better than others?

Scenario 3

In another election to select 3 representatives, the system has been designed to minimise “landslide” wins by one party. This time, each voter casts just one vote. There are three parties active in the ward - the Red Party, the White Party and the Blue Party - who each reason that they are highly unlikely to get two of the three available seats. At the election, the Red, White, Blue and Green Parties each stand one candidate and each of the 1000 voters casts their vote as follows:

- Red Party 330
- White Party 310
- Blue Party 290
- Green Party 70

The Red, White and Blue Parties each get one seat. What would have happened if this seat had been contested using the system from Scenario 2? Notice that, despite the numbers being very close between the three main parties, this didn't matter in this election - what mattered was the gap between the three successful candidates and the fourth candidate. Do you think this ward was hotly contested?

What are the disadvantages of this type of system? If you were a Green Party activist in this ward, what would you do?

Scenario 4

In another election to elect 1 representative for the seat in Scenario 1, some form of preferential voting system has now been introduced - either the two-round system (France) or the alternative vote (Australia). The Blue Party holds the seat - in the last election under the old system, the Blue Party won with 40%, with the Red Party second on 35%. Since that time, the Red Party has fragmented into three - the Crimson Party, the Real Red Party and the Purple Party. The differences between these splinter groups are largely unnoticed by the voters, though. The 1000 voters cast their first preferences as follows:

- Blue Party 400
- Pink Party 250
- Crimson Party 200
- Real Red Party 100
- Purple Party 50

The Blue Party is well ahead, but realises its days are numbered; when people's second and subsequent preferences are taken into account (either by counting 2nd or lower preferences, or by holding a 2nd round of voting) they know the voters will

coalesce behind one of their opponents. This indeed happens, and the final result is:

- Blue Party 400
- Crimson Party 600

Victory, then, to the Crimson Party, despite being placed third on first preference votes. The Blue Party complains that, as the choice of more voters than anyone else, they should have won; the Crimson Party replies that, clearly, the main concern of most voters was to remove the Blue Party from the seat, and that has duly happened. Who was right?

Scenario 5

In another seat to elect 1 representative by preferential voting (either the alternative vote or the two-round system), three parties are active - the Red Party, the White Party and the Blue Party. The White Party is seen as a “nice” party by voters, and both Red Party and Blue Party voters overwhelmingly give their second preferences to the White Party. White Party voters themselves tend to split their second preferences between the Red Party and the Blue Party, with the majority preferring the Red Party.

It’s a closely fought fight. In a meeting of the Red Party campaign team, one week before the poll, their top pollster reveals the likely first preference votes, assuming 1000 voters:

- Red Party 400
- White Party 320
- Blue Party 280

The mood is gloomy because everyone present realises that, once the Blue Party is eliminated, the Blue Party’s votes will go to the White Party and elect a White, by roughly 600 votes to the Red’s 400 votes. Do you think this would, party allegiances aside, be the just result?

However, the party’s top strategist has an idea. She is going to speak personally to 50 ultra-loyal Red Party supporters in the seat, and get them to vote for the Blue Party instead. This happens, and the actual vote takes place. The first preference votes are then:

- Red Party 350
- White Party 320
- Blue Party 330

The White Party is now eliminated; its voters' second preferences are fairly evenly split, with 170 preferring the Red Party and 150 preferring the Blue Party. At the end:

- Red Party 520
- Blue Party 480

A great victory for the Red Party. What do you think of this kind of tactical voting?

Some months later, details of the plot are leaked, but the Red Party shrugs it off: "We won by 52% to 48% even after 5% of our supporters had tactically voted Blue, so we certainly deserve the win." Do you agree?

Scenario 6

A national parliament is made up of 100 individual seats, each with fairly similar demographics. At a national election, every one of the seats posts a result like this:

- Yellow Party between 40% and 60%
- Red Party between 20% and 40%
- Blue Party between 10% and 30%

The Yellow Party thus wins all 100 seats. In response to criticism, the Yellow Party leader states that each seat has chosen the person its voters want best to represent it, and none of the results in the individual seats are in doubt. Its 100 members will seek to govern in the interests of all the people, whether they voted for them or not. Do you agree with the Yellow Party leader?

Scenario 7

As a concession to Red and Blue Party supporters, the Yellow Party allows future parliaments to be made up of 100 individual seats plus a further 50 "top-up" seats. To create the 50 top-up seats, the country is divided up into 10 regions, each electing 5 top-up members, who serve in addition to the individually-elected members.

The election system for the top-up seats in each region is designed, like the additional member system in Germany, New Zealand, Scotland or Wales, to ensure that the *overall balance of seats in the parliament* (not the overall balance of top-up seats) is as close to the voters' overall voting intentions as possible. Voters will cast two votes, one for their individual seat and one to indicate their wishes at regional level.

If you were a Yellow Party candidate for a top-up regional seat, how would you be feeling? Would you be campaigning hard?

If you were a wise and savvy Yellow Party voter, thinking about how to cast your regional vote, what would you do?

Some people have suggested that, rather than give voters two votes, they should just cast a single vote - so, for example, a vote for the Yellow Party would count both towards the local Yellow Party candidate for the local seat, and towards the Yellow Party at regional level. Is this better or worse than giving people two votes?

The Yellow Party proposes that the regional vote be conducted by means of a closed list system - each party submits an ordered list of candidates for each region, so that if a party wins 3 seats in a region, its top three candidates are deemed elected. The Red Party denounces this as a recipe for cronyism - do you agree? Why do you think that, once introduced, the Red Party might be secretly rather happy with the closed list system? Can you think of any alternative methods for selecting regional representatives?

Which is better - to be an individually-elected member or a regionally-elected member?

Scenario 8

The White Party and Green Party, both of which have pockets of support in some areas of the country but low levels of support nationally, propose that, instead of the “two types of representative” system proposed by the Yellow Party, there just be 20 seats, each electing 5 representatives - the system of election might be the single transferable vote, as used in Ireland, but it needn't be this. “The important thing here,” said the White Party leader, “is to ensure that no-one should have a seat by right, just by being placed at the top of a list.” Do you agree? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this method, as opposed to the “individual member plus regional top-up” method?

Under both this proposal and the previous scenario's proposal, all voters will in future have 5 or 6 elected representatives. Is this a good or a bad thing?

Scenario 9

The Yellow Party's preferred system is enacted. In one particular seat, Trumpton West, the Yellow Party candidate wins the election to be an individually-elected member, easily defeating the Red Party, Blue Party, White Party and Green Party candidates.

However, because the candidates for the Red, Blue, White and Green Parties were also placed as their party's leading candidates on the regional list, all four of them are subsequently declared elected.

From the perspective of a voter in Trumpton West, it means that all five of their local candidates got elected in some way - should this be celebrated? If not, why not, and what could be done to prevent it happening again?