Campaigning under the single transferable vote

Revised edition

A guide for candidates, agents and parties in Scotland

Second edition

ERS

This revised and updated November 2006 edition includes additional information about the number of candidates a party should nominate (section 3.4) and the counting process (section 4.10). It also contains a new chapter about how non-party candidates go about campaigning under STV, an issue is a major concern in some areas of Scotland (section 5).

Contents

1.0 Introducing the single transferable vote

1.1 STV: A NEW SYSTEM FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Scottish Parliament has decided that the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system will be used for local government in Scotland from the next local elections (scheduled for May 2007).

STV will be new to most people in Scotland, although it is used for all elections in the Republic of Ireland and most Northern Ireland elections, including local authorities. Before 1929 it was used to elect Scotland's local education authorities.

STV will not just make elections fairer and councils more representative – it also has the potential to revive Scotland's ailing democracy. It will involve some changes for political parties, but changes which will be for their long-term benefit.

1.2 HOW IS STV DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SYSTEMS?

STV is different from the other systems currently used in Scotland, which are:

- First Past the Post (FPTP) for Westminster elections, and local elections before now.
- Additional Member System (AMS) for Scottish Parliament elections.
- Party List proportional representation (List PR) for European Parliament elections.

Following the legislation that introduced STV in local elections, the UK government announced that a commission of inquiry, the Arbuthnott Commission, would look at the implications of having four systems running alongside each other. One of the options it is considering is the use of STV for Scottish Parliament elections. The Commission is due to report at the end of 2005.

Unlike FPTP, STV gives fair representation to the political parties, in proportion to their support. It will no longer be possible to win overall majorities on councils despite being outvoted 2:1 (or worse) by the local electorate. Labour's majority in Edinburgh in 2003 rested on the support of only 27.4% of those voting. Parties winning a considerable but thinly spread vote in FPTP can fail to win a single seat, as the SNP did with nearly a quarter of the vote in Midlothian. Labour could well suffer from similar injustice in future elections. Under STV minority parties with a significant degree of support will have a voice.

Unlike FPTP, STV does away with most sorts of tactical voting – people are free to vote for who they like most and need not fear 'letting in' who they like least.

Unlike AMS, STV uses a less complicated single ballot paper.

Unlike AMS and List PR, STV can give the voters, rather than the parties, power to choose which candidates represent them.

Unlike List PR, STV maintains the link between an elected representative and a local constituency area. The constituencies are much smaller than the regions used for list seats and the direct link is there as members are chosen, as individuals, by the voters.

Introducing the single transferable vote

The key features of STV are:

- Several people are elected from the same multi member constituency or ward at the same time. For Scottish local government this will involve 3 or 4 councillors per ward, with correspondingly larger wards. This resembles the pattern in most of England and Wales.
- Voters vote by ranking individual candidates in order of preference (1,2,3…). They do not have to rank all candidates or vote for an entire party slate.
- The number 1 choice ('first preference vote') is most important. But if the candidate already has more than enough votes to be elected, or too few to stand a chance, the vote will be used to help the next choice of that voter (the vote, or the unused part of the vote, is 'transferred').
- Candidates who poll a certain proportion of the vote (25 per cent in 3-member wards, 20 per cent in 4-member wards), called the 'quota' are elected. This means that the main parties will be represented roughly in proportion to the votes they have polled.

More details of how STV works are available from the Electoral Reform Society (www.electoral-reform.org.uk, ers@reform.demon.co.uk or from 6 Chancel Street London SE1 0UU). The counting rules are more sophisticated than those of FPTP but it is very simple from the voters' point of view. This booklet aims to explore some of the issues from the point of view of the parties and answer questions about campaigning strategy, how many candidates to stand and relationships between parties.

2.0 STV Campaigning basics

2.1 THE MAIN POINT

STV is about giving voters a choice of candidates and fair representation for their views. Although STV tries to give voters what they want, it is also fair to candidates and parties.

In STV elections there are no substitutes for having *attractive policies*, choosing *good candidates* and running *good campaigns*. All else is incidental.

2.2 PARTIES CAN WIN – AND LOSE – EVERYWHERE

The idea of 'safe seats' and 'marginal seats' is central to campaigning in First Past the Post elections. The campaign focuses on the marginal seats, where the work of party activists can make the difference between winning and losing. A party can depend on its safe seats sticking with it, unless there are strong local factors or a particular tide in public opinion. There is no advantage, at least in terms of seats, in piling up a majority of 1,000 when the ward can just as easily and securely be won with 500 with no work. Similarly, there is no immediate value in fighting hard in a hopeless seat to gain 17% rather than 7% of the vote.

STV IS VERY DIFFERENT

The bad news for some

There is no such thing as a safe seat under STV

The good news for all

There are hardly any hopeless seats under STV

A ward under FPTP where, say, Labour poll 50-55% or so and the rest of the vote is scattered between the other parties would be a very predictable Labour seat to which nobody would devote much attention. But if it were a four-member STV seat, Labour's campaigning efforts might make the difference between winning two seats or three seats. The other parties would also find it worth campaigning, not only to try to deprive Labour of the third seat but also to come top in the race for the non-Labour seat or seats, and to persuade supporters of other parties to transfer their lower preferences in the right direction.

Also, while parties are able to rely on getting some of their candidates elected in particular seats, where parties stand more than one candidate the decision as to which of the party's candidates is elected is up to the voters.

A ward with the voting patterns shown in the table opposite (figures from Victoria Park in Glasgow in 2003)

STV Campaigning basics

	% vote	FPTP	3-member STV	Incentives to campaign
Labour	39.4	Safe seat.	One seat almost guaranteed, and the chance of another	To win a second seat
SNP	17.9	No chance	One probable seat	To make sure of the seat, and to stay in the count by maintaining the SNP's lead over the other smaller parties
SSP	14.7	No chance	Small chance of a seat, but votes will influence outcome	To build the vote nearer 25% to win a seat (the SSP might not expect many transfers from other parties unless their candidate is personally popular)
LD	14.4	No chance	One possible seat	To remain in contention during the count and attract transfers
Con	13.6	No chance	Small chance of a seat, but votes will influence outcome	To build the vote nearer 25% to win a seat (the Conservatives might not expect many transfers from other parties unless their candidate is personally popular)

would be a predictable Labour hold under FPTP, with little incentive for any party to campaign. Under STV it is different. With three members, Labour win one seat but the other two are uncertain. With four members, Labour will probably have two but the other parties will all fight hard for the other two seats. The number of seats in the ward, as well as the voting patterns, will determine which wards are marginal for which party.

Some currently marginal areas might seem to become safe under STV. In a ward (like the present Ninewells in Dundee) where Labour and SNP both have just over 40 per cent of the vote, and the other parties less than 10 per cent each, a four-member ward would probably deliver two seats each to Labour and SNP. However, a three-member ward would mean intense competition between those two parties for the third seat. Even with four seats, the two main parties cannot afford to be complacent in the long term. This is because if one of the other parties increased its support into the mid-teens, it would be a contender for a seat, or a popular individual from one of the smaller parties could draw off enough transfers to get elected. It might be also be worth the SNP's while to try for a third seat.

Whatever the particular tactical position, energetic, imaginative campaigning and a popular message will be good both for the individual candidate and the party.

STV Campaigning basics

INFORMATION GATHERING IN IRELAND

The political parties in Ireland take information-gathering very seriously. In general elections it is considered normal for the party to have spoken face to face with 70% of voters. Between general elections the major political parties are able to conduct detailed opinion surveys in important constituencies. Although these are carried out by volunteer party members, mainly door to door on Saturdays, the surveys are conducted by random sampling and in numbers (perhaps 400 in a constituency) which allow statistically significant findings.

The high level of political activism in Ireland makes gathering this sort of information possible at reasonable cost. Fine Gael, the perennial second party in Irish politics, had a bad election in 2002, but even at the low ebb after that result could claim 21,500 members. Relative to population, this would be the equivalent of over 325,000 members of a UK party (more than any has at the moment). Membership increases during the candidate selection and general election process. The level of activism is also higher, and during elections candidates can count on the help of family and friends who are not necessarily affiliated to the party. Fianna Fáil recorded about 60,000 members in 2003, the equivalent of over a million members in the UK context.

2.3 INFORMATION – THE NOT-SO-SECRET WEAPON

Getting the most from an STV election involves a great deal of information. Most of the time, particularly in local elections, it is not going to be possible to obtain all the information you might want given the limitations to campaigning resources.

Useful considerations in deciding how many candidates to stand, and campaign strategy in general, would include:

- How many people are strong supporters of the party?
- How many people might vote for one of the party's candidates because of personal or other factors?
- How is support for the party, and for individual candidates, distributed throughout the area?
- Are supporters of other candidates and parties prepared to give your candidates transfers? If so, which candidate is most attractive to transfers?

These questions are on top of the familiar issues involved in campaigning, such as what local issues matter to people and the general pattern of party support.

The resources used by the parties in Ireland are not going to be available to any party in the vast majority of wards in Scottish local government elections. A more minimal plan of information gathering may prove feasible, perhaps through sporadic canvassing or responses to local leaflets, and it is for the party organisers to decide what is realistic under the circumstances.

In the Scottish context, a well-organised party which has taken the trouble to gather information is going to do better than a party that has not sorted out its nomination and campaigning strategy. But in local elections in particular it is unrealistic to expect the sort of organisation and information that the Irish parties can muster.

STV does not necessarily require all the sophisticated information and campaigning techniques that are used in Ireland – though if resources allow these methods are of course useful. What it does mean is that well-organised parties that have taken care to listen to the electorate and communicate with it are rewarded for their efforts.

3.0 Candidate issues

3.1 HOW MANY CANDIDATES SHOULD WE RUN?

The answer to this question is obvious in most cases under FPTP – you run a candidate for as many seats as are being contested (or as many as you can if you cannot manage complete coverage). Motives include the hope of winning, maintaining the vote in a ward that is part of a key constituency, or just showing the flag.

Under STV choosing how many candidates to run is one of the most important decisions to be made by a party.

There will be very few cases in which a party can expect to win all the seats on offer in a ward. To achieve this in a 3-seat ward requires three whole quotas, i.e. 75% of the vote, or a certain amount of good fortune with transfers during the count. In any case, it is extremely difficult with less than 70%, a level that is conceivable in few areas of Scotland.

Nearly everywhere, therefore, it is impossible for a party to achieve a clean sweep. 2 out of 3, or 3 out of 4, will normally be as much as can be expected.

There is no single, simple answer to the question of how many candidates a party should run in a particular ward. Much depends on your assessment of local circumstances and personalities. However, there are several arguments and considerations that should affect the decision.

3.2 ARGUMENTS FOR RUNNING FEWER CANDIDATES

STV, by and large, rewards parties in proportion to their support among the electors. If all voters were strictly loyal to the party it would not matter how many candidates a party ran, because the votes would transfer neatly from eliminated candidates to keep their running mates in the contest. This is more or less the case in Malta. Party loyalty in Malta is so strong that there is no disadvantage for over-nominating; the Malta Labour Party has in the past nominated 19 candidates for a 5-member seat! In Australian STV elections a fairly small minority of voters may give a party their first preference but then transfer support to candidates from other parties with their second and lower preferences. This is called **leakage**. Leakage is more of a factor in Northern Ireland (although votes tend to stay on one side of the unionist/nationalist divide), and very common in the Republic of Ireland where sometimes fewer than half the vote transfers to a candidate of the same party. It is not clear, and probably will not be clear until a couple of elections have passed, where Scotland fits in on the spectrum between Malta and Ireland.

A GOOD REASON: KEEPING YOUR VOTE INTACT

- Running too many candidates means that some will be eliminated early in the count and, because of vote leakage, fail to pass on the full strength of their votes to the running mates. If the party stands to lose even 30% of a candidate's vote when the transfer takes place, it is best to avoid this wherever possible. The more leaky the vote, the stronger this argument becomes. In Appendix B below, Fine Gael suffered from a high rate of leakage and were out of contention for a seat; they might have mounted a better challenge with only one candidate.

- The risks are even greater for small parties if their vote is at all leaky – dividing an already small vote can result in candidates being eliminated early in the count.

- It is plausible that the longer the ballot paper, the more leakage will take place. Many voters will not want to hunt through all the names listed to make sure they have voted for every single candidate of the party. They might instead only mark a couple of preferences, or choose to give

Candidate issues

transfers to candidates of other parties. Keeping nominations down means that your voters will have less work to do when they try to vote for all your candidates.

PARTY MANAGEMENT REASONS ...

There are some party management considerations that may militate for fewer candidates, particularly when there are incumbents. Take a 4-member seat where the party has two incumbents and, say, 50% of the vote last time. With only the off-chance of a third seat, party managers might think it not worth the hassle they would get from the incumbents, both of whom would worry about being displaced by the new candidate. However, in such situations party managers, in the interests of democracy as well as of the electoral prospects of their party, might need to insist on running the third candidate. Party managers who take the easy way could miss out on an opportunity. It is this sort of situation which could result in divisive intra-party contests.

STV, by giving the voter choice of candidate even within the same party, can cause instability in representation. In Ireland it is not uncommon for members to lose their seats to a colleague from the same party. The party might regard preserving leading figures, or people whose expertise is useful to the party or council group as a whole, as a consideration in deciding how many people to nominate in particular wards.

3.3 ARGUMENTS FOR RUNNING MORE CANDIDATES

■ **Making full use of your support.** The party might experience a surge in support during the campaign, or miscalculate how much support there is in the local area. If it fails to stand enough candidates, for instance by running only one candidate in a ward where there is enough support to elect two, it will lose out. This happened to the Labour Party in Ireland in 1992. In Dublin North, for instance, Labour's candidate won 14,693 first preference votes while the quota for election was only 8,636. His surplus would probably have been enough to elect a Labour running mate later in the count, but there were no other Labour candidates to receive the transfers and instead they helped elect a Green. In 1997, when Labour's popularity fell, Labour lost the seat but the Greens retained theirs, which they would not have had if Labour had run two candidates in 1992.

■ **Broadening your appeal.** Running more candidates allows the party to poll more first preference votes. In Ireland it is important to run candidates who cover the different localities within the constituency, particularly if the constituency is made up of more than one county. In one such constituency, Longford-Roscommon (to be replaced in 2007 by two cross-county constituencies) votes from one county for candidates from the other, whatever party, are negligible, and any party that was seriously in contention would need two candidates, one from Longford and one from Roscommon. Some electors will choose their local candidate of your party first, but give their lower preferences to the local candidates of other parties. Some electors will be pleased that the party has given their area respect and recognition, and therefore also give their lower preferences to the party running mates. A 'sweeper' candidate from a populous locality can mobilise voters to go to the polls in that area, and even if he or she is not elected themselves the votes can flow on to their running mates. A candidate with local non-partisan popularity can, by attracting extra personal votes, increase the party's effective share of the vote as long as that candidate is elected.

Local considerations may apply in Scotland too, but issues such as ethnic representation and gender balance will be important. In countless surveys, voters report that they want to see elected bodies that better reflect the

Candidate issues

PARACHUTING IN IRELAND

In some respects, candidate selection in Ireland is highly centralised. The choice of how many candidates are to run in a particular ward or constituency is made by the party centrally. The local party then conducts a nominating convention at which delegates or members select as many candidates as they are allowed.

But the parties also reserve the power to add extra candidates to the ones chosen by the local party, and to decide who those candidates will be. While this is not commonplace, neither is it only used in very occasional circumstances – about 8% of Fine Gael local government candidates were selected in this manner. There are occasions when the party will allow the nominating convention only to select, say, a single candidate in a seat where it is obvious that the party stands a chance of winning two seats, to leave space for imposition at a later stage. There are several reasons why this power may be used:

- To take advantage of a change in political circumstances in the run-up to the campaign. For instance, Labour's lost opportunities in 1992 because of under-nomination encouraged the party to change the rules so that if there was another tide in its favour it could add candidates to reap the full benefit.
- To balance the party's ticket locally. For instance, if the party's organisation is so strong in one locality within the constituency that it would end up choosing all the candidates from that one place, the party's electoral appeal would be weakened. Headquarters can step in and nominate a candidate in the interests of geographical diversity (and therefore by extension gender or ethnic balance in other contexts).
- To balance the interests of incumbents and the party in general. Constituency organisations can be dominated by personal supporters of incumbents. They might follow the interests of the incumbents and either not nominate enough candidates or nominate deliberately weak running mates.
- To obtain the nomination of a favoured candidate who would not stand much chance in the normal nomination process.

communities they serve. STV will give them more flexibility to show that, and parties that select a diverse slate of candidates may be the beneficiaries.

Running more candidates encourages better campaigning. Take a 4-seat constituency where the party gets 25-30% of the votes election after election. It would be possible to run only one candidate, who would be pretty certain of getting in and might therefore get complacent and not do much campaigning. The more daring option would be to run two candidates, who by working hard might raise the vote nearer to 40% and therefore give the party an extra seat. There is virtue in a bit of healthy competition in improving standards of campaigning and therefore the party's overall appeal to the public.

- **Insurance.** If you are running only one candidate and he or she is hit by a scandal or some other serious problem, you are sunk. If you have more than one, you can still hope to elect the untainted running mates.
- **Managing transition.** In a transitional situation, running a large number of candidates might be better for party management than easing out sitting councillors, particularly in areas where, say, four incumbents are being reduced to perhaps two.

Introducing the single transferable vote

3.4 BALANCING THE CONSIDERATIONS

Provided that voters attracted to a party's candidates place at least some importance on the party label, and that rivalries between candidates can be contained by a framework of party discipline, the balance will tend to be tipped towards running more candidates rather than fewer. In Ireland, a rough rule of thumb (varied depending on local circumstances) is that a party will run one more candidate than it expects to see elected.

A party that runs too few candidates can miss out on opportunities in the short term, and waste away in the long term by narrowing its appeal and doing no more than it finds necessary to elect its single candidate. Running two or more candidates enables a party to refresh its appeal and helps new talent to come forward, to the benefit of the party and the community in general. The potential of an extra candidate to broaden the party's appeal will often more than counteract the effect of extra leakage. For instance, in the Irish European Parliament election in 2004 in the East constituency, the two Fine Gael candidates had a very competitive relationship. The decision to run two candidates initially seemed to damage party unity and the prospect for intra-party transfers by voters. However, both campaigned so vigorously that they were both elected.

The extra party activity that comes with having several candidates can stimulate voter interest and turnout. A party with one seat it thinks it can take for granted is exposed to the risk of differential turnout in favour of parties that campaign harder, offer voters a genuine choice, and have two or more motivated candidates in the field.

3.5 HOW SHOULD WE ORGANISE CANDIDATE SELECTION?

Selecting several candidates at once involves some different considerations from just selecting a single person, and has an effect on important relationships within the party. Among the questions raised are:

- Should the ward, district or Scotland-wide party have the final say over how many candidates are nominated?
- Should there be rules set down controlling the process, for instance to ensure gender balance?
- How can the party best ensure that its slate of candidates represents different areas and interests within the ward?
- What voting system should be used in the local party's internal elections to decide who should be the candidates?

The answers are going to be different depending on the culture of the party concerned and the circumstances of the local area. What happens in Ireland is obviously not directly transferable to Scotland, although it may be interesting to note the policies on candidate selection which are shared by the principal parties in the Republic.

Each party will of course have its own approach to these issues. But there is no ignoring the issues that have led the Irish parties to adopt central control over nomination numbers and the ability to parachute candidates. How the parties choose to resolve them in Scotland is up to them.

4.0 Campaign techniques

4.1 HOW SHOULD WE ORGANISE OUR CAMPAIGN?

There are several possible models of how to organise a campaign with several candidates.

In multi-member local government wards in England and Wales the party's candidates normally share an agent, campaign as a team and – if any other volunteers can be rounded up – make up a formal or informal campaign committee with the agent. The agent normally has responsibility for the whole borough. This sort of structure would be easily adaptable for use in STV.

In Ireland there is a more complicated structure. The party appoints a Director of Elections, who is sometimes himself or herself an elected representative, who takes overall charge of the campaign in the area and takes decisions relating to where each candidate should campaign, party literature and campaign and vote management in general. Each individual candidate also has a campaign manager, who represents his or her interests in discussions and can (subject to the decisions of the Director of Elections) schedule appearances, write literature, organise canvassing and delivery and so on. Leaving aside regulating competition between candidates, it would be foolish to duplicate efforts by having different candidates canvass the same area on successive evenings, for instance.

It may take a little trial and error before finding the structure that best suits the party culture and local conditions in Scotland.

4.2 TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL CAMPAIGNING

- Campaigning as a team means that there is less vote leakage. Campaigning as individuals means that the party's overall first preference vote may be higher. It will depend on the circumstances which is more advantageous. Ultimately, though, the way the votes fall between the candidates is the voters' choice and there is a limit to how much the party can do to affect this.

- In recent years the parties in Ireland have tried to promote a common identity through branding election materials. This means insisting on common colours, font, logos, design and so on which material promoting individual candidates must use.

- In the Irish Labour Party in particular, candidates using personalised election material are required to use some of their space to promote their running mates.

- In multi-member local government wards in England, publicity for individual candidates is not usual. Most publicity material takes the form of promoting the party's team of candidates on equal terms. This is logical enough when the voters have several equal votes and can use them to help all the party's candidates equally. But in an STV election, even if a voter gives you a first preference, they might wander off and give lower preferences to others. It also matters, even for loyal party voters, which order the candidates are ranked in.

- In Ireland, where personal campaigns are a strong feature of the political system, it is unrealistic to require candidates to appear as a team or not at all. In Australia, most party election material in states using STV promotes the team and advises the voter to rank the party's team in whatever order they feel like (leakage is small-scale in Australia). Even in Australia, however, individual candidates run websites promoting first preference votes for themselves.

- In Scotland, at least initially, the idea of the 'team' will probably be attractive in situations where a party is running more than one candidate. However, this sort of arrangement will start to erode. If one candidate is more energetic and does more canvassing than the other, she will probably attract more first preferences than her running mate, even if she makes no overt appeal.

Campaign techniques

And what is to stop candidates and their personal supporters making informal requests of voters on the doorstep? A controlled and regulated system of candidate-centred promotion is more likely to work than an outright ban on personal campaigning, and less likely to lead to divisive internal party discipline cases.

■ One method of regulating personal campaigning is to divide the ward into areas and set rules about what is permitted in each area. Several variations on the principle have been tried in Ireland. The simplest method is to divide the ward into as many subdivisions as there are candidates, and allocate exclusive campaigning rights in each patch to one or other candidate. This can make sense when there are strong local loyalties within the ward, for instance if the ward unites two fairly small towns and the party had one candidate from each town. Other more complicated patterns exist, in which candidates may be allowed to campaign where they like on certain days, or parts of the ward are 'open territory' rather than being allocated to one or other candidate. If a party is intending to go down this route, it is as well to establish clear rules at an early stage before campaigning heats up. Parties would be well advised to ensure that geographical subdivisions are allocated fairly – for instance, that areas of known strength and weakness for the party are distributed equally. Parties may also want to play to the strengths, contacts and local profiles of their candidates. For example, you may want the candidate who is involved in a women's community group to appeal to women's groups across the ward or a local business owner to build on his or her profile in the business sector. This may cut across geographical divisions.

4.3 LEADING CANDIDATES

In Ireland, and indeed in other countries that use STV, **it is usually considered a bad idea for the central party to specify the order of preference between candidates**. A significant exception is in Northern Ireland, where this issue is the subject of careful management. The Democratic Unionist Party in particular tends to encourage its supporters to vote '1' for the big figures such as Ian Paisley and transfer down to others, as they can be confident of winning much more than a full quota.

However, specifying an order is unlikely to be a good idea in Scotland. Overt favouritism between candidates – particularly in public campaigning – is almost guaranteed to create bad feeling between the candidates and hinder the party's effort to present its team. It also may not be successful with the electorate, because people dislike the feeling of being dictated to by party headquarters, and may decide not to follow instructions. Attempting to maximise the party's representation by telling voters to vote in a particular order can also misfire even if the voters do what they are told. If the party's calculations about the strength of the party's vote are even a little inaccurate, it can result in the candidate the strategy is designed to help losing out when the votes are counted.

Parties' central publicity generally advises 'vote for all our candidates in the order you prefer', or a similar form of words. Publicity for individual candidates generally advocates a first preference for that candidate and then, if there are two candidates from the party, a second preference for the running mate. If there are several candidates, the pitch will tend to be 'vote for me first, and then for all my party colleagues in the order you prefer.'

Nevertheless, in some circumstances it is very clear that, for reasons of individual popularity or seniority within the party, one candidate is clearly the leading figure in the party in that particular area. In Ireland, particularly popular individuals are often elected with votes that go way over the quota required for election. Bertie Ahern won 1.6 times the number of votes he needed to be elected in Dublin Central in 2002.

There are two possible responses to this situation. One is to try a bit of vote management (see 4.9 below) and advise the party's most faithful supporters to give their first preferences to the running mate and hope that the

Campaign techniques

leader's popularity among floating voters sees him or her through. This is risky but potentially rewarding.

The other, which is probably more usual, is to work with the leader's popularity. Although it technically makes no difference, a strong personal vote can be a political virility symbol and strengthen the leader's hand in coalition negotiations. Electorally, the strategy in this case would be to promote the popular leader as the face of the party, and make the argument that people should vote for the leader and the team. For this approach to work, one needs to have confidence that the leader's popularity will rub off on the party in general. Campaign techniques can emphasise the importance of supporting the rest of the team, but in some circumstances a purely personal vote will not come across.

Leader and team campaigning has been successful in Dublin Central, where Ahern has consistently polled far in excess of his Fianna Fáil running mates. Except in 1992 his surpluses have always helped elect running mates, even when they have polled poorly – in 1989 Ahern's surplus pulled two candidates with only about a third of a quota each over the winning line.

The strategy is more common in Australian STV, because party loyalty is greater. In the 2004 Australian Capital Territory election, Labor Premier Jon Stanhope won over double the quota (three in every four Labor votes) and 87 per cent of his surplus flowed to help his running mates.

4.4 ARGUMENTS THAT WON'T WORK ANY MORE

'DON'T LET X IN – VOTE FOR Y INSTEAD EVEN IF YOU REALLY SUPPORT Z!'

STV does away with this form of tactical voting. There is no reason for people who really support Party Z not to vote for Z with their first preference vote. If Z really is a small minority in the area, their second preference votes can help Y if that is what the voters want to do.

'IT'S A TWO HORSE RACE – X CAN NEVER WIN HERE'

There will be no more two horse races – at least three horses will come past the post everywhere, and nearly everywhere they will be wearing at least two sets of colours. And in a four-member seat, to guarantee a win you need only 20%, which a bit of hard work and differential turnout can often achieve. Candidates who attract transfers can get through with even less than 20%.

'YOU'RE ALL RUBBISH – WE'RE BRILLIANT'

You might get some seats with a slashing campaign against the evils of the other side, if you have enough loyal supporters. You would do better with a bit of persuasion, and putting over your own views strongly but constructively. If you go over the top in your condemnation of a party, you will not do well in attracting second preferences from that party's supporters. If you are vitriolic about all the other parties, the chances are that their supporters will gang up on you and use their transfers to support each other's candidates rather than you. And you will probably then be isolated once the election is over, unless you are extremely sure that you can get a majority. STV tends to produce no overall majority in the council chamber, and usually to get anything done you will need to work with people who were your opponents in the election.

Campaign techniques

4.5 CANVASSING – WHAT IS A VOTE?

Canvass returns are often over-optimistic, as every experienced campaigner knows all too well. But under STV there is an additional danger. You may well find on the doorstep that a voter will assure you that 'I'll vote for you.' Under FPTP this person can be marked as a party supporter and therefore, if a knock-up is being done, someone whom you need to make sure goes to the polls. But under STV the person might mean, 'I'll vote for you, but not your running mate.' They might also mean, 'I'm giving someone else my first preference, but I like you enough to give you a second or third preference, and that's kind of a vote, isn't it?'

Canvassers need to be clear that the first question to be asked is whether the voter is going to give his or her first preference ('Number one vote') to your candidate. If yes, the next question is whether the voter is going to give the party running mates their next preferences. If no, the next question is whether you might get their second or third preference after they have finished voting for their top choice candidate or party.

4.6 HOW CAN WE OBTAIN SECOND PREFERENCES?

It is very difficult to model the effects of STV from results in First Past the Post elections. The differences are very important and affect not only who is elected for a given set of votes, but also how electors choose to cast those votes in the first place.

- Under FPTP, a party's support may be seriously understated because of tactical voting. With STV (and to a certain extent the regional list vote in the Scottish Parliament system) the latent support becomes apparent. A party whose vote has in the past been squeezed for tactical reasons can bounce upwards because people are now free to cast first preferences for the party they support, rather than a negative vote to stop the party they like least from winning.

- The personal appeal of individual candidates is very important under STV.

- Some parties are more 'transfer-friendly' than others. A party commanding broad sympathy from supporters of other parties is better placed to attract transfers than a party about which people have strong views for or against. In England, for instance, very few people would give the BNP second preferences. The minority who share its values would vote for it with their first preferences, while the majority who strongly dislike the party would give it nothing. However, in Northern Ireland the Alliance Party gets rather few first preferences but can attract substantial second and lower preferences because, nearly uniquely, votes transfer in from parties on both sides of the divide. The Greens in the Republic also tend to gain in preference transfers. Parties which can make a successful appeal for second preferences can build up to win seats even if they do not have many first choice votes, while others that seem just short of a quota may not win a seat.

Appealing for second preferences is a tricky area of campaigning. An overt appeal for second preferences might dissuade people from giving you a first preference!

- Strategy will depend on whether your party is more or less transfer-friendly than the others in the election. A party that attracts few transfers might be best off consolidating its base.

Campaign techniques

- You need enough first preference votes not to get eliminated during the early stages of the count before you have attracted any transfers.

- Sometimes a negative appeal can work to attract second preferences – 'vote for me second, or else the lot you *really* dislike might get in'. This can extend to electoral pacts (see 4.7 below).

Perhaps the most important implication of second preferences for campaign strategy is that **it is worth canvassing and leafleting in areas which do not produce many first preference votes for your party.**

It is even worth approaching confirmed supporters of other parties in search of second preferences. This is particularly the case for parties such as the Lib Dems, Greens and SNP whom surveys have shown could do well in attracting transfers, but the other parties would be unwise to ignore the potential of this sort of campaigning themselves.

Remember that there are as many rationales for transfers as there are voters, and not all will follow the patterns you might expect. In Ireland, about 15% of transfers from the two main parties flow across to their main opposition: FF to FG and vice versa. In 2002 21% of the transfers from the Progressive Democrats, a free-market liberal party, went to Labour. Twenty Belfast West voters in 2003 even gave their first preference to Gerry Adams and their second preference to the Ulster Unionist Party.

BUILDING TRANSFERS TO VICTORY

Eileen Bell was elected for the North Down seat for the Alliance Party in the 2003 election for the Northern Ireland Assembly. From a first preference count of only 1,951 she was elected with 5,237 votes. Only 587 of her 3,188 vote gain came from her eliminated Alliance Party colleague. In the Republic in 2002, Green Party candidate in Cork South Central Dan Boyle was elected after building up from 4,956 votes to 9,332 during the count. His colleague Paul Gogarty in Dublin Mid-West was elected in a three-member seat thanks to transfers from other parties, despite starting with less than half a quota.

4.7 ALLIANCES BETWEEN PARTIES

If two or more parties have been working together in a coalition, and none of them can realistically aspire to an overall majority, the question arises as to what their attitude should be to each other in the election campaign. Party supporters may naturally wish to emphasise the most distinctive policies and attitudes of the party, to maintain the party's identity and maximise first preference votes for the party. This can be a good strategy, as if a party's support increases it has more leverage even if the previous coalition is reconstituted – for instance, a council administration supported by a four-strong Green group might accept more of that party's agenda than if there was only a sole Green councillor.

But preference voting under STV creates additional possibilities. Parties may wish to help each others' candidates by advising their supporters on where their lower preferences should go once all of their first choice party's candidates are eliminated. In Ireland there are sometimes formal agreements between the parties about preference transfers. In 1997, for instance, there were two broad coalition options (Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrat, or the 'rainbow' coalition of Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left). In forming a government it made obvious sense for the parties to encourage supporters to use lower preferences to help allies rather than opponents.

The prime example of the power of such agreements is what happened in Ireland in 1969 and 1973. In 1969 Fine Gael and Labour were operating independently and polled 34.1 per cent (50 seats) and 17.0 per cent (18 seats) of first preferences respectively, while Fianna Fáil won a majority with 45.7 per cent (75 seats). In 1973 Fianna Fáil support rose a little to 46.2 per cent, while the combined Fine Gael and Labour vote fell from 51.1 per cent to 48.8 per cent. Yet because the parties' voters followed their advice on transfers, they gained several seats and were able to form a majority coalition government with 54 Fine Gael seats and 19 Labour to 69 for Fianna Fáil. The agreement between Fine Gael and Labour benefited both parties – they were able to be in government when they would have lost had preferences transferred in the same way as in 1969. This is not the same as parties getting more seats than others with

Campaign techniques

more votes as sometimes happens with FPTP – with STV the 'vote' is more than the first preference. It is possible for a general increase in positive views about a party to be reflected in a better showing in second preferences rather than a higher first preference vote.

Sometimes there are fine judgements to be made in coalition situations. In 2002 Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats were running as a coalition. Polls during the campaign indicated that it was possible for Fianna Fáil to win an overall majority. This would be undesirable from the PDs' point of view, as they would then lose all their leverage. The PDs spent the last week of the campaign persuading people to vote for them first rather than their coalition partners! It worked, although there was understandable displeasure from the FF ministers when the coalition Cabinet met again for the first time after the election.

Minor parties can also benefit from being in alliance with each other and pooling their electoral resources as the count progresses.

Under STV, stating a lower preference for another candidate cannot harm the interests of a more-preferred candidate. As long as the higher-placed candidate is still in the count (i.e. neither elected nor eliminated) the lower preferences do not matter. It is only when transferring surpluses or votes for eliminated candidates that the lower preferences matter.

If your party has, say, 2 candidates in the election and someone votes 1 and 2 for those candidates and 3 and 4 for others, the voter is not harming the chances of any of your candidates. **It is pointless to discourage people from using their lower preferences. It could make the difference between electing a councillor from another party you can work with, and one you can't. It is better to encourage voters to make as many sensible choices as they can.**

In Ireland, journalists often ask leading figures in each party how they intend to cast their own personal lower preference votes. It is advisable to have an answer ready, in order to minimise embarrassment and perceptions of 'splits'.

4.8 HOW CAN WE REDUCE LEAKAGE?

The stronger the positive support for a party, the less likely it is that voters will 'leak', i.e. fail to support all the party's candidates. A party that inspires enthusiastic support, through putting forward good policies and strong candidates, should not suffer too much leakage. A party that takes voters for granted may find some of its supporters wandering off, first of all by failing to vote for the entire slate and perhaps eventually abandoning the party altogether.

Beyond this general point, there are some things that a party can do to minimise the problem.

- A team identity (see 4.2 above) helps signal to voters that they should use all their top preferences for the party's candidates.
- Party literature needs to reinforce the message that supporters should support ALL party candidates.
- The party should encourage regulated, harmonious relationships between running mates, so that candidates will promote each other willingly and not engage in internal strife. In Ireland, an unusually large amount of leakage often suggests that the candidates have been at war with each other as much as the opposition. Some possible approaches to regulating the contest are given above.

The design of the ballot paper has some effect on the amount of vote leakage that takes place. If candidates are grouped by party, rather than alphabetically or randomly, it would probably reduce leakage. Long ballot papers are conducive to leakage. In practice, unless parties over-nominate, 3-4 member STV should produce ballot papers of a similar size to those used for multi-member ward elections in England and Wales.

Campaign techniques

4.9 VOTE MANAGEMENT

Vote management is the Irish term for the techniques used by major parties to get the best out of the system. There is a certain amount of mythology about what it can accomplish. It cannot produce seats from thin air – STV rewards parties broadly in proportion to their votes and if you don't have enough votes, you won't be elected. What vote management can achieve is, in situations where the party is on the cusp of getting, say, two seats rather than one, to nudge the odds somewhat in favour of getting two.

The basic principle is to ensure that the party's candidates are roughly level with each other throughout the count, and that no candidate is elected or eliminated in the early stages. Vote management requires a lot of help from the voters and a lot of information to succeed. The idea is probably best grasped through an illustration of how, more successfully practised, it might have won an extra seat.

A fully worked, real-world example from the 2002 Irish election is given in Appendix B, but the basic principle can be grasped with a simple arithmetic example. Suppose there are only two places left to fill in an election, and there are two parties in contention and no surpluses or other candidates to be eliminated.

Candidate A1	400 votes
Candidate B	250 votes
Candidate A2	200 votes

Candidates A1 and B are therefore elected. However, if Party A's support had been more evenly distributed between the candidates the result might have been:

Candidate A1	330 votes
Candidate A2 (i.e. 70 Party A voters voted for A2 instead of A1)	270 votes
Candidate B	250 votes

Candidates A1 and A2 are therefore elected and Party A wins an extra seat compared to what it would have obtained without managing the vote.

If you have a candidate whose support runs beyond the section of the electorate who normally vote for your party, it might pay to encourage party loyalists to vote for the running mate. This is, however, a strategy that has its risks. In Irish politics it is regarded as a sign of courage and loyalty for a leading figure to adopt it.

However, an evenly spread vote might not be a sign of vote management – it could just reflect what happens when roughly equally strong candidates run campaigns independently of each other. Nor are attempts to manage the vote always successful. To work, vote management requires good information, co-operative candidates and voters who are willing to fall into line with the strategy.

Campaign techniques

4.10 AT THE COUNT

Because under STV the last seat is usually 'marginal' in some sense, the scrutiny of ballot papers at the count needs to be more of a priority than it is in most wards under FPTP. Even if it has been the practice in your area, it may be advisable to establish with the Returning Officer that each ballot will be verified and counted in full view.

It is important to adjudicate early in the count over which ballot papers are spoiled and which have some discernible expression of voter intent. This is more complicated under STV. For instance:

A ballot paper with a cross for one of your candidates and no other mark on the paper will be a vote for that candidate only.

Ballots with crosses for both of your candidates will be completely invalid, because it is impossible to establish which candidate is the first preference.

The precise rules on validity will be established by official regulations, but note that when lower preferences may be counted, it is a more complex matter than trying to argue for excluding 'theirs' and including 'ours'.

The counting process will take place using optical scan electronic equipment, which tends to be faster and more accurate than hand counts. One feature of the system is that it alerts human operators and the parties' representatives at the count when there is any uncertainty or lack of clarity on the ballot papers, to allow adjudication by the Returning Officer.

The computer program also produces a stage-by-stage analysis of the STV count, explaining how the result has been reached.

The optical scan system will probably work too quickly in Scotland to permit the sort of informal information gathering that takes place in Ireland (where the skills of the 'tallymen' are highly valued), but the published results will contain a lot of voting data. The details of the count, and the preference orders chosen by voters, will be useful information in planning future campaigns.

The Scottish Executive, in partnership with the Electoral Commission, will be running a public education campaign about the electoral systems being used in the Scottish Parliament and local authority elections in May 2007, and the Electoral Reform Society has established an office in Edinburgh to assist with information and advice. However, parties have an interest in making sure that their supporters use their votes effectively, and that they do not lose their votes through mistakes in marking the ballot paper. It is therefore worth explaining how to cast STV votes at the same time as you are promoting your local government candidates. Parties that fail to do this may suffer if their loyal supporters end up invalidating their ballot papers because they have used multiple crosses to vote.

STV is easy from the voter's point of view. While any unfamiliar system tends to involve an increase in spoiled ballot papers, adequate information and responsible campaigning can keep it to a minimum. Any party that tries to make 1,2,3… voting sound complicated will only be damaging its own prospects.

Campaign techniques

4.11 BY-ELECTIONS

When vacancies arise during the council's term, by-elections will take place. This will almost always involve an election for a single councillor at a time. The whole ward will participate in the election and it will be conducted under the 'Alternative Vote' system, which is simply STV used to elect one person. Voters will still use the 1,2,3… form of voting, and parties will have to bear in mind the question of attracting transfers.

However, by-elections will be a bit different from normal elections. Unlike in STV, advising supporters how to use their lower preferences is to imply the possibility of defeat. A major difference comes where the party defending the seat is locally in the minority. For instance, a vacancy for a Conservative seat won because of a 25 per cent Conservative vote in a three-member ward otherwise dominated by Labour will be difficult for the Conservatives to defend. Labour could gain the seat even if the party's popularity falls compared with the last multi-member election. By-elections will also tend to be more dominated by the main population centre within the ward, because STV's ability to represent minorities does not come into play.

When the next full set of elections comes round, a by-election can create issues for the parties. For instance, a Labour gain in the situation mentioned in the previous paragraph will have caused a temporary situation where there are three Labour councillors, a position that is very unlikely to survive a full STV election. Labour's candidate nomination strategy for that ward is therefore more complicated than usual.

5.0 Independent candidates under STV

5.1 INDEPENDENTS UNDER STV

The Single Transferable Vote is more favourable to non-party candidates than most proportional systems because it involves choosing between candidates rather than party lists.

Independents therefore compete on equal terms with party candidates, unlike, for instance in the regional lists for Scottish Parliament elections – although even then, it is possible for Independents such as Margo MacDonald to win election.

The Republic of Ireland, which has used STV since the state was formed, has a larger proportion of Independents in its national legislature and local authorities than most countries. Even in Northern Ireland, Independents can win through despite entrenched community loyalties, as with Dr Kieran Deeny in the West Tyrone constituency in the 2003 Assembly election.

5.2 WHAT WILL CHANGE IN MAY 2007?

However, as with the political party candidates, things will also change for Scottish Independents with the new electoral system. Much of the advice that follows may be of particular interest to established Independents in rural areas, although it should also be relevant to new non-party candidates even in areas where that form of politics is unfamiliar.

The change from small single member wards to multi-member wards will increase the electorate in each area. Independents who have relied in the past on strong personal support drawn, say, from their home village will have to respond to the new position.

In areas where Independents are traditionally strong, there are likely to be more candidates coming forward representing the main political parties, and more competition in general. While this is good because it gives the electorate more choice, it means adapting the way sitting councillors and candidates go about campaigning.

In areas traditionally dominated by the political parties, STV offers an opportunity for Independent candidates, and those representing very small local parties (independent' with a small 'i' covers both categories) to enter the process and stand a good chance of election. There is a chance for leading figures in the community, campaigners on local public services, or private individuals with ideas they want to see raised at local council level, to stand and win. STV means that voters can make a more subtle choice at elections. They may decide to give an independent their first choice but the next preferences to their usual party, or vice versa. It may well mean that voters are increasingly open-minded about the possibility of voting for independents.

Independent candidates under STV

5.3 CAMPAIGNING IN MULTI-MEMBER WARDS

There are several approaches available to independents in the new multi-member STV wards.

A strong localised vote

Because STV does not require a candidate to gain a majority of votes in order to be elected, it is still possible for an individual candidate with overwhelming popularity in his or her home turf to win, based on support in that part of the ward alone. For example, if a candidate has 80 per cent of the vote in a village which is a third of a three-member ward, this is 27 per cent in the whole ward even if she gets no votes anywhere else. The quota for election being 25 per cent, she is elected on the first count.

This sort of strength requires a very strong personal identification with the electorate – and a lack of challengers from the same area. Some Independent councillors in Highlands and Borders managed to achieve this sort of overwhelming support, but many others fell a little short. Elections in Ireland show that locality is very important to voters there. It may well be that many second preferences transfer to other candidates from the same village regardless of party, which could help a locally popular independent to clear the quota and get elected.

However, candidates need to be highly popular individuals to win on friends and neighbours voting in a subsection of a multi-member ward. It will often be necessary to campaign in other parts of the ward.

Campaigning independently across the ward

One sort of appeal is on the basis of a record of service to constituents or non-partisan good judgement, or on a local issue that affects several areas of the ward. Voters in other areas of the ward may welcome the chance to vote for an independent, or at least give such a candidate their second preferences.

Relations with other independent candidates, where they exist, are an issue to consider. Each case will vary, because each independent candidate is different and has different relations with his or her neighbouring councillors. Some of the closest and most active contests in the Scottish local elections in 2003 in rural areas were between different Independent candidates, so it should not be assumed that independents will automatically ally with each other.

Allying with other independents

However, one response to multi-member wards has been for sitting Independents to band together, with the expectation that their supporters will give fellow Independents their second preferences. Candidates in this position may or may not decide to issue something like a joint manifesto (perhaps particularly when they have been running the council administration together), or rely on mutual respect for each other's local service and good judgement. Whatever form an alliance takes, it is worthwhile for candidates to remind their supporters (in leaflets and in personal conversations) about what they can do to help fellow independents. This arrangement has the benefit of pooling the local strength of each candidate to the benefit of all.

Allying with a political party

Many independent councillors will have a political outlook that is broadly sympathetic to one or other political party (or, in areas where party labels are unusual in local politics, even be members of a party in a private capacity). It could make sense for such candidates to come to agreement with that party. If the party is itself standing a candidate in the ward, this could amount to an agreement to recommend that voters 'swap preferences', i.e. that the party voters give the independent their second preference, and the independent voters likewise favour the party candidate.

Such an arrangement has benefits for both the independent and the party. The independent has the potential to gain support in areas and among communities where the party cannot reach – often the votes will be complementary rather than competitive. The party may gain a councillor from the arrangement who, although not toeing the party line, will tend to be supportive. The independent gains second preferences from party supporters without having to spread himself and his campaigning efforts too thinly, and without subjecting himself to the party whip in the council chamber.

Political parties may need to amend their rules in order to allow such deals. Standing against an official party candidate under FPTP or AMS is incompatible with membership of a party because doing so damages the interests of the party. Under STV, standing as an independent alongside the party does not necessarily damage the party and therefore need not be regarded as standing 'against' the party.

Independent candidates under STV

In the longer term, independent candidates may emerge in areas which are currently run by the parties with similar 'fellow travelling' status. For instance, a tenants' association leader might want to retain independence from the Labour Party on housing issues but support Labour on most other matters. Even candidates under the party label may want to develop distinct profiles on different issues to maximise the party's support. Perhaps after repeated experience with STV, the difference between party and independent will become much more blurred than it is at the moment.

5.4 NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTIES AND INDEPENDENTS

The political environment will undoubtedly change for non-party candidates for Scottish local government. In areas currently dominated by the parties, there will be opportunities for new local forces to make their presence felt. In areas currently dominated by Independents, there will be a chance for the political parties to make their appeal. The increase in competition will benefit the electors. If there is a public appetite for non-party local representation, STV will ensure that people get it.

6.0 Conclusion

It will take several elections for the full consequences of STV to work themselves out, particularly as it is only being used for one level of government in Scotland and the two most powerful tiers (the Scottish Parliament and Westminster) will continue to use other systems for the time being.

The parties will naturally wish to concentrate their energies on maintaining their vote in the marginal Westminster seats and Scottish Parliament constituency seats, which may mean that the strategy for fighting local elections changes relatively little. Parties have limited resources and need to target the most important levels of government. If the Scottish Parliament were to adopt STV this would have a stronger effect on the way politics is carried out than a change affecting only local elections.

Information, candidate strategy, campaigning techniques and vote management are all of some importance under STV. But the main point of the system is that parties and candidates are rewarded broadly in proportion to the votes they have received, and that strong campaigns and popular candidates are the best way to receive more votes. All else is detail.

Appendix A The Irish context

We use several examples of elections that have taken place in Ireland to illustrate points about campaigning in STV. The Republic has used the system ever since independence and is probably the best source of information on how STV interacts with a multi-party system. While there are technical differences between the counting system in Ireland and Scotland, the essentials of STV are the same. STV has also been used for all elections in Northern Ireland since 1973, except for Westminster elections and the 1996 Forum election.

The Republic of Ireland is probably the most useful point of comparison most of the time when discussing the possibilities for STV in Scotland. In Malta in particular, and to some extent in Australia, there is strong party loyalty and a deeply rooted two party system which makes the dynamics of STV different from a multi-party country such as Scotland. In Northern Ireland, while there are many political parties, the unionist/ nationalist divide provides a dimension to politics that is not comparable in Scotland.

The parties in the Irish Republic have the longest experience in operating under STV and while their experience cannot be read straight across, and there are aspects of Irish politics which owe more to culture and social structure than the electoral system, their approaches can be a starting point for thinking about STV in Scotland.

A rough description of the main parties in Ireland follows, in order to assist in analysing the context of some of the examples.

FIANNA FÁIL

The dominant political party of Ireland since the early 1930s, it has polled the most votes in every election in 70 years. It is a centrist, mildly nationalist and socially conservative, party. It is the only party that can feasibly aspire to an overall majority, although this aim has not been achieved in any election since 1977, or to govern on its own outside a coalition (although the last time it did this was in 1987-89).

FINE GAEL

The second placed party of Irish politics. It is a centrist, mildly liberal and reformist, party. Fine Gael is the only non-Fianna Fáil party to have attained the office of Taoiseach (Prime Minister) although since the early 1930s it has required coalition partners (Labour and/or minor parties) to form a government.

LABOUR

Labour is the sister party to the Labour Party that operates in Britain – a pragmatic and mildly left of centre and reformist party. It remains a relatively small party and is in a pivotal place in the party system, having formed coalitions with Fine Gael in the 1970s and 1980s, Fianna Fáil in 1992-94 and then Fine Gael and the Democratic Left party in 1994-97. It absorbed the Democratic Left, a post-communist party, in 1998 and DL provides much of its current leadership.

GREENS

The Greens are the sister party of the British Greens. They first won a seat in 1992 and have consolidated their presence in the Dáil, to the extent that they would probably be part of any future non-FF coalition.

SINN FEIN

Sinn Fein operates across Ireland. Its appeal in the Republic is twofold – traditional republicanism in the areas near the Northern border, and left-wing community politics in deprived urban areas.

Appendix A The Irish contex

PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS

Formed originally in the 1980s as a breakaway from Fianna Fáil, the PDs are a free market and fairly socially liberal party – their opponents sometimes call them Ireland's Thatcherites. They have served two spells in government in coalition with Fianna Fáil (1989-92 and since 1997) although they went into the 1989 election in an electoral pact with Fine Gael.

SOCIALIST PARTY

The Socialist Party is a Marxist party in the same tradition as Militant and some currents within the Scottish Socialist Party. It won a Dáil seat in 2002.

INDEPENDENTS

Independents are a persistent feature of Irish politics. Many of them are dissident members of the main parties who have fallen out over national or local matters or been unfortunate in party selection contests. STV allows independent candidates to put themselves before the electorate and compete with the official nominee without splitting the vote.

Appendix B Vote management: an example

This Appendix gives a detailed example of how vote management can benefit a party if practised successfully. In Kerry South, in the Dáil election of 2002, Fianna Fáil could have won two seats rather than one if the party's vote had been spread more evenly between its two candidates. It is a three member seat, and the quota for election in 2002 was 9,162 votes.

THE FIRST PREFERENCE RESULTS WERE:

O'Donoghue	FF	(elected at first count)	9,445
Fleming	FF		6,912
Healy-Rae	Ind		6,229
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab		5,307
Fitzgerald	FG		4,539
Casey	FG		1,934
Grady	Ind		1,346
Barry	Ind		934

Electing O'Donoghue in the first count was not helpful for Fianna Fáil. There are three reasons:

1. O'Donoghue's surplus of 283 votes is redistributed and part of it leaks away. Of these votes, only 152 went to his running mate Fleming (53.7%), while 74 helped Fleming's most dangerous competitor, Healy-Rae. Redistribution of the surplus of 283 produced only a 78-vote gain for Fleming versus Healy-Rae.

2. O'Donoghue is not available to receive transfers from other candidates as they are eliminated. His strong first-preference score indicates that he is a popular vote-getter who has the potential to attract transfers across party lines.

3. Fleming's lead over Healy-Rae is small and vulnerable to the effects of transfers from other candidates later in the count.

THE POSITION AFTER THE ELIMINATION OF THE TWO ALSO-RAN INDEPENDENTS WAS:

O'Donoghue	FF	(elected at first count)	9,445
Fleming	FF		7,255
Healy-Rae	Ind		6,819
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab		5,946
Fitzgerald	FG		4,791
Casey	FG		2,216

NEXT, O'DONOGHUE'S SURPLUS IS REDISTRIBUTED:

O'Donoghue	FF	(elected at first count)	9,162
Fleming	FF		7,407
Healy-Rae	Ind		6,893
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab		5,979
Fitzgerald	FG		4,811
Casey	FG		2,220

Appendix B Vote management: an example

CASEY OF FG IS NOW ELIMINATED:

O'Donoghue	FF	(elected at first count)	9,162
Fleming	FF		7,593
Healy-Rae	Ind		7,147
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab		6,432
Fitzgerald	FG		6,083

There are a couple of interesting things to note here. First is that the margin between Fleming and Healy-Rae has narrowed from 683 in the first count to only 446 now, and Fleming cannot expect much more help from the transfers from the opposition parties, Labour and Fine Gael. Second, Casey's vote leaked and despite the total Fine Gael first preference being over a thousand more than Labour's, their last candidate is now due for elimination. The Fine Gael voters who put Casey first and Labour second effectively knocked Fitzgerald out of the election.

O'Donoghue	FF	(elected at first count)	9,162
Fleming	FF		8,276
Healy-Rae	Ind		8,409
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab	(elected at sixth count)	9,442

The transfers from Fine Gael have now put Healy-Rae ahead of Fleming, and elected Moynihan-Cronin for Labour. Although Fine Gael did not elect any candidates themselves, their voters have influenced the result to help elect Labour and Independent. Because Labour are 280 over the quota and the gap between the two remaining candidates is only 133, there needs to be another count to distribute the Labour surplus:

O'Donoghue	FF	(elected at first count)	9,162
Fleming	FF		8,381
Healy-Rae	Ind	(elected at seventh count)	8,584
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab	(elected at sixth count)	9,442

This only serves to increase Healy-Rae's lead, and the Independent is now declared elected. Healy-Rae, starting with 6,229, gained 2,335 as the count went on while Fleming improved his initial 6,912 by only 1,469.

Appendix B Vote management: an example

But superior FF vote management could have elected Fleming without any change in the views of the electorate of Kerry South. Suppose instead that 1,000 loyal Fianna Fáil supporters had decided to give their first preferences to Fleming instead of O'Donoghue. The result on the third count, after eliminating the two minor independents, would have been:

		Real	Managed
O'Donoghue	FF	9,445	8,616
Fleming	FF	7,255	8,084
Healy-Rae	Ind	6,819	6,819
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab	5,946	5,946
Fitzgerald	FG	4,791	4,791
Casey	FG	2,216	2,216

For these purposes the transfers going in reality to Fleming have been divided equally between him and O'Donoghue. As we have seen, this assumption is likely to understate the combined strength of Fianna Fáil in the later counts because O'Donoghue would probably attract extra supporters who would otherwise transfer to opposition candidates.

The two next stages are to remove the two Fine Gael candidates (although their combined total is higher than the votes for the next two candidates, the Casey vote leaked so much that Fitzgerald was still bottom of the poll after she was eliminated). This would give:

O'Donoghue	FF	8,616	+143	+340	9,099
Fleming	FF	8,084	+143	+340	8,567
Healy-Rae	Ind	6,819	+253	+1,257	8,329
Moynihan-Cronin	Lab	5,946	+452	+2,298	8,696

Healy-Rae is still lagging behind Fleming at this last count, so that Fleming and the Labour candidate join O'Donoghue as the winners. Better vote management would clearly have delivered a second seat to Fianna Fáil rather than the Independent. After the count, Fleming supporters were displeased that O'Donoghue had campaigned in Killarney, one of the areas they had been relying on.

However, it is always easier to spot opportunities for vote management after the count has been concluded, rather than at the start of the campaign when it would be most useful. Fianna Fáil would need to know the electorate very well in order to work out from the start that switching 1,000 votes between its candidates would get the party the extra seat. Vote management can be a risky strategy. If the party had overestimated the number of votes that needed to be switched over to Fleming, it might have managed to elect Fleming only to see O'Donoghue defeated during the count! This would have been more than a little embarrassing given that he was Minister of Justice at the time.

This guide has been written by Lewis Baston, the Electoral Reform Society's Research and Information Officer. Much of the guide is based on information and advice provided by campaign managers of the major parties in Ireland and Irish political scientists. We are very grateful to them for their assistance.

The Electoral Reform Society has long campaigned for the use of the Single Transferable Vote, the voting system that best combines proportionality of outcome with the extension of voter choice. The views expressed in this guide, however, are those of the author.

Designed by Texture 020 7739 7123

Contact details

Electoral Reform Society
6 Chancel Street
London
SE1 0UU

Telephone
020 7928 1622
Fax
020 7401 7789

Email
ers@reform.demon.co.uk
Web
www.electoral-reform.org.uk

Electoral Reform Society Scotland
91 Hanover Street
Edinburgh
EH2 1DJ

Telephone
0131 718 4280
Fax
020 7401 7789

Email
amy@reform.demon.co.uk
Web
www.electoral-reform.org.uk

Second edition published Nov 2006

£4.00

ISBN 0 903291 29 0