LARGEST REMAINDER

(Not quite Quota Notes)

In this issue

Editorial

The 2013 election will be remembered as the rise of the 'micro parties.'

What we dignify with the name micro parties are in fact lobby groups.

If they are genuine in their aims they should not be running for Parliament; they should be lobbying **both** sides of politics to adopt their views – that's the only way they can succeed.

Electoral Reform Australia, for example, is a lobby group. Our views on electoral reform will not be adopted unless they are taken on board by a major party, preferably both major parties, which can win government and thus implement policies.

We would not run as a party because we cannot achieve anything that way. We don't have policies on child care, nuclear disarmament, unemployment or asylum seekers, because we are a lobby group for electoral reform.

If Electoral Reform Australia were elected to Parliament and held the balance of power, we could possibly have our views implemented by blackmailing the party that needed our support to govern. That would be a very poor long term strategy as the very next time there was a change in the power balance our policies would be thrown out.

A lobby group has to lobby both sides in order to be successful. Becoming a single-issue 'party' effectively alienates the parties you are supposed to be influencing.

Optional preferential voting – make it meaningful

Why the need for any artificial 'minimum' to be voted for? Say 6, or 20, or 'the number to be elected'?

What's wrong with voting for at least one, or for as many as you choose to?

Under PR – or STV – as we prefer to call it – a voter has a <u>single</u> <u>transferable</u> vote.

A *single* vote means one vote. You vote for your chosen representative – one person.

Your vote is *transferable*. If the person you have chosen is not elected, your vote can be transferred to another candidate of your choice – your second preference. And so on, until your vote elects someone.

Saying that you must vote for 'as many as are to be elected' means to some people that they have more than one vote: that they themselves are actually electing six people. It is misleading and unnecessary.

The issue of exhausted votes is always raised.

It is a furphy.

Sure, there may be an increase in the number of exhausted votes, but there will be a larger corresponding decrease in the informal vote, which means a higher overall participation rate in the election.

A single [1], or even a single tick or cross that is unambiguous, should be a formal vote. It's easy, inclusive and, dare I say it, democratic. The icing on the cake is that you can still indicate who you would prefer if your favourite is not elected.

Voting should be simple. It's a matter of choice. Making that choice can be hard, so why make the expression of that choice even harder?

The case for fully optional preferential voting for the Senate

by Stephen Lesslie

As many of you know, Electoral Reform Australia has been a strong advocate for fully optional preferential voting. We believe that any vote that clearly indicates a first preference should be considered a formal vote. We believe voters should be encouraged to give further preferences but should not be punished if they choose not to.

Our philosophy is simple: when a voter has made a clear and unequivocal statement of their views, what gives a government the right to say that their voice will not be counted because they have numbered insufficient squares.

Can any reader explain why it is necessary to deny a voter their franchise?

I recently received the following example of a typical contribution to this debate:

> *"It is necessary to have some compulsory marking of preferences in order to preserve the proportional nature of the Senate voting system, which is the best in the world, but it is not necessary to require all 97 to be marked. The marking of preferences should be optional after, say, the first 20."*

Where is the mathematics and the research to justify this blunt assertion? More importantly, where is the humanity and the inclusivity that proportional representation should be encouraging?

We have to stop votes exhausting '*to preserve the proportional nature of the Senate voting system*'. Do votes exhaust in sufficient numbers to actually threaten the voting system?

Senator Xenophon, in a recent interview, suggested optional preferential voting for a minimum of six candidates. This is a great improvement on 100+ or even a 'say 20' but what does it achieve?

Let's look at Senator Xenophon's own South Australian 2013 Senate vote. (Note that these are provisional figures.)

He received 239791 votes (1.7 quotas). A quota is 142415 votes. The formula for determining the transfer value is:

$$\text{Transfer Value} = \frac{\text{Candidate's Total Vote} - \text{Quota}}{\text{Number of ballot papers} - \text{Exhausted ballot papers}}$$

$$= \frac{239791 - 142415}{239791 - 0}$$

$$= 0.406$$

Therefore the votes transferred to Senator Xenophon's running mate are:

$$239791 \text{ votes } \times 0.406 = \frac{97355 \text{ votes}}{(0.683 \text{ quotas})}$$

Consider a hypothetical situation - and one highly unlikely to occur - where one third of Senator Xenophon's voters do not give any second preferences.

$$\text{Transfer Value} = \frac{\text{Candidate's Total Vote} - \text{Quota}}{\text{Number of ballot papers} - \text{Exhausted ballot papers}}$$

$$= \frac{239791 - 142415}{239791 - 79930}$$

$$= 0.609$$

Only 159861 votes transferred to Senator Xenophon's running mate but the transfer value was 0.609. Thus:

$$239791 - 79930 = 159861 \text{ votes } \times 0.609$$
$$= \frac{97355 \text{ votes}}{(0.683 \text{ quotas})}$$

Did you notice? Despite the exaggerated number of votes that only gave a No. 1 in the second scenario, Senator Xenophon's running mate received exactly the same vote both times.

This demonstrates the fact that **if a candidate has more than a quota, there are no exhausted votes**.

A real life example of this is Katy Gallagher's count in the 2012 ACT election for the electorate of Molonglo. She received 26% of the vote (2.1 quotas) *and not a single vote exhausted.* In ACT elections, a single No. 1

remains a formal vote.

What happens to exhausted votes if a candidate receives a large vote but not quite a quota?

This time we examine the vote gained by Senator Xenophon at the 2007 election. He received 148680 votes, which was just 4850 votes over a quota (143830). We have just seen that had this result occurred with fully optional preferential voting, no votes would have exhausted.

Had Senator Xenophon instead fallen short of a quota by 4850 votes, what would have happened to any votes that only gave a single No. 1? He would now have 0.966 quotas and would be very confident of gaining the extra 4850 votes from micro parties or transfer leakages from the major parties.

What happens to those votes that fail to give a second preference? Absolutely nothing! They never move, no matter how many there are. They remain in his pile until he is elected or, in an extremely unlikely scenario, until the end of the count, and he remains unelected as the first runner up.

Of course, should those voters have been required to vote for a minimum of two or six or twelve candidates, their votes would have been declared informal. For every vote declared informal, Senator Xenophon, in this example, would need another vote from elsewhere.

This example demonstrates that **for any candidate who, at the conclusion of the count is elected or remains as the first runner up, there are no exhausted votes**.

For in a real life example, check the 2012 ACT election for the electorate of Ginninderra. No candidate received a quota. The five successful candidates and the first runner up received a total of 39034 votes out of 66076 (59%). Not a single vote from these candidates exhausted.[1] Remember, in the

ACT a single No. 1 is a formal vote; under more draconian informality rules many of these votes would have been excluded from the count.

Nonetheless, in a single transferable vote (STV) ballot, some votes will exhaust.

Some voters will preference candidates and parties that are eliminated early in the count and will fail to continue preferencing until a serious contender is reached. These votes will always exhaust. Voters who deliberately stop preferencing will simply find sufficient makeweight candidates to thwart the provisions.

For example, there were voters in NSW who voted 1 to 99 (out of 110) in the 2013 election simply to avoid giving a preference to either of the major parties. For voters who accidentally fail to vote for sufficient candidates, no amount of coercion or education will significantly reduce the numbers involved. These exhausted votes have no influence on the result and are equivalent in effect to informal votes. But they are not doing any harm and their views should be respected; had the electorate as a whole voted differently they might have played a part.

Senator Xenophon's (and the Proportional Representation Society of Australia's) suggested minimum of at least as many preferences as there are candidates to be elected will increase both the informal vote and the exhausted vote!

All parties will feel compelled to run a full complement of candidates. Any party that doesn't risks their votes being declared informal because their supporters only voted for candidates in the party grouping. This also discriminates against the parties which may not reach the 4% electoral deposit threshold. Whilst electoral deposits should be increased they should not be increased by subterfuge.

Standing a full complement of candidates also has the potential to increase the number of exhausted votes as many, even a majority of, voters once having voted for the six (or

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[1] The runner up's votes were transferred in the very last count and votes did exhaust but this transfer was to determine the order of elected candidates - not to determine which candidates were elected. It is revealing how many votes actually did transfer since

there were only two candidates left in the count able to receive them.

twelve) candidates in the party group will not seek to find further candidates in a different columns because they will believe they have completed their task. When candidates are excluded later in the count many more votes will exhaust.

This requirement to vote for as many candidates as there are places to be filled will also increase the total number of candidates, particularly makeweight candidates standing for election. No candidate should run for election unless they actually want to be elected. Imagine the size of the ballot paper in a double dissolution election if every group felt compelled to run twelve candidates.

This gives our third proposition: **votes that do exhaust are an insignificant proportion of the total count. Any attempt to eliminate them results in an even greater proportion of informal votes and consequent decrease in voter participation. Any attempt to reduce votes that exhaust is counterproductive.**

For proof, check out the NSW Legislative Council or almost any of the larger NSW local government elections such as those with wards between six and twelve (similar in size to the Senate) and observe that, once the last candidate in a group is eliminated, then the majority of votes exhaust. Compare that with ACT elections where most of the minor parties, including The Greens, do not run a full complement of candidates and where the majority of voters will find another group after voting for all the candidates within a party group. This is despite ACT voters being permitted to vote just [1].

Conclusion

The only way to prevent exhausted votes is to require each voter to number every square. This is of course, undemocratic and unacceptable as it results in either preference harvesting or an excessive level of informal votes.

Any attempt to limit the number of exhausted votes by insisting on a minimum number to be voted for is counterproductive and, paradoxically, results in an increase in the number of votes exhausting.

But why the fear in the first place? Only in Australia is there a fear of exhausted votes. Ireland and Malta, the only two countries which elect their governments by STV, allow a single No. 1 to be a formal vote.

The belief that proportionality will be compromised by allowing fully optional preferential voting is nonsense. The great majority of proportionality is carried by the No. 1 vote. Transferred votes only carry their transfer value. It is only logical - the more No. 1s, the more proportional the result.

The relaxation of informality rules results in fewer informal votes and greater voter participation.

Anyone who insists on demanding greater complexity in voting needs to show the research, the mathematics and the logic for such actions and justify the decision to deny voters the right to have their vote counted.

Future Meetings

The next meeting will be held on Saturday 7 December 2013 at 1.00 pm.

Anyone is welcome to attend. For details, please contact Susan Gregory at president@electoralreformaustralia.org or on 9181 5185 for the relevant information.