

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE SECOND GREEN PAPER ON ELECTORAL REFORM

This submission looks particularly at one of the main reasons for the high level of informal voting, the frustration of voters that do not wish to vote for any of the candidates on the ballot paper. A change to the voting system is suggested which would empower these frustrated voters, lead to a better reflection of voter intention and potentially lead to superior candidates being nominated by political parties.

The recommended change revolves around the inclusion of a notional candidate on each ballot paper termed "none of the above". The notional candidate would be placed last on each ballot paper and be treated as all other candidates in the allocation of preferences. In the event of the notional candidate winning a majority of votes after the allocation of preferences then a further election for the constituency would be held after a set period at which none of the previously nominated candidates would be eligible to stand.

The advantage of the proposed change is that voters could more effectively vote against one, several or all nominated candidates. For example, if the true voter intention is to vote for a candidate but not vote for any of the others, the nominal candidate could be placed second on the ballot paper. This would make it less likely that less preferred candidates would be elected. Also, an elector, dissatisfied with their preferred party's candidate selection could place the nominal candidate first on the ballot paper followed by their party's nominated candidate. This would send a protest to the political party without being forced to vote for an alternative political party.

At the extreme, an electorate which is highly dissatisfied with all the nominated candidates could force a second poll with a new set of candidates. For an individual, the proposed arrangement would allow for a valid vote to be cast where the voter, for whatever reason, is unable to vote for any of the nominated candidates.

For political parties, there may be an advantage seen in the possibility of a second ballot even if they have selected a candidate who turns out to be highly unpopular individually in an electorate which is highly attached to a particular political party. Political party strategists may also favor the arrangement to allow for the strategic allocation of preferences for a host of reasons which could only be speculated in advance.

The obvious disadvantages with the proposal are that it may cause delays in the finalization of an electoral result and the potential for greater costs. However, the improved reflection of voter intention and the avoidance of informal votes would outweigh these concerns.

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