

## Improving the Primaries?

Because of the weaknesses in the plurality voting system, which is used in the primaries, it is tempting for many American's to adopt a ranked choice voting system (what Australians call the preferential system)<sup>1</sup>. While ranked choice voting does have some advantages over a plurality system (first past the post), it still suffers from some of the same weaknesses.

Suppose there are 3 candidates who are seeking selection as the party's candidate, and there are 100 voters:

Candidate A receives 40 votes  
Candidate B receives 25 votes  
Candidate C receives 35 votes

After the first count candidate B is out of the race. Is this fair to the voters if Candidate B was the second choice of all the voters (75 voters) who did not vote for her? No it is not. Clearly candidate B was the most popular candidate. 60% of voters preferred candidate B to candidate A, and 65% of voters preferred candidate B over candidate C. The problem can be more pronounced when there are more candidates running.<sup>2</sup>

Suppose there are two candidates you really like in a 7 candidate race. You prefer one candidate (candidate A) over the other (candidate B). Now let us also suppose that most voters feel the same way about candidate B, she's not their first choice, but she is their second. Unfortunately for candidate B this might mean she gets knocked out after the first or second count simply because she is not the first choice of a sufficient number of voters. Overall, she might be the most popular candidate. This is not fair to that candidate or the voters.<sup>3</sup>

Under ranked choice voting, the more candidates you have the more likely it is for a radical to win on preferences. (In a ten candidate race it is possible for a candidate to win with 20% of the first preferences, and 49% of the last preferences, beating a candidate that 95% of voters gave their second preference to.)

There is a far better system than plurality voting or ranked choice voting.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the preferential system (currently used in Australian federal elections, 2024) all boxes must be numbered, and only the primary votes (first preferences) are counted in the first count. If a candidate has over 50% of the primary vote, they will be declared the winner. If no candidate has over 50%, whoever has the least primary votes after the first count is kicked out of the race, and all those who voted for that candidate now have their second preferences counted (all preferences are equal to one vote when counted). If no candidate has over 50% of the vote after the second count, one candidate drops off and their preferences are counted. The process continues until one of the candidates receives over 50% of the vote. (The preferential system is explained in the following video. <https://youtu.be/n2mQ64dZrbo>)

<sup>2</sup> A similar weakness exists in the exhaustive system of voting. Under the exhaustive system of voting, if no one receives more than 50% of the vote on the first count, one candidate is excluded from the race (the candidate with the least votes) and another round of voting begins. Voting continues until one candidate receives a majority of the votes.

<sup>3</sup> Under the preferential system the winner of the final vote might have only received 20% of the primary vote, but on the final count wins because candidate B is now out of the race, so most people settle for their third or fourth choice. (Under first past the post the problem is even worse. A radical could win the vote with a relatively small percentage of the votes, but because they received more votes than any other candidate, they win.)

## The Modified Points Preferential System

The proposed system looks a lot like a ranked choice system, but it is not.<sup>4</sup> To explain the proposed system and how it is more reflective of the voters' wishes I will use 7 candidates and you as the voter vote as follows.

Candidate A	<input type="text" value="1"/>
Candidate B	<input type="text" value="2"/>
Candidate C	<input type="text" value="3"/>
Candidate D	<input type="text" value="4"/>
Candidate E	<input type="text" value="5"/>
Candidate F	<input type="text"/>
Candidate G	<input type="text"/>

5 boxes must be numbered (from 1 to 5) and no numbers can be repeated or skipped. If a candidate receives over 50% of the primary vote (the number ones), they win selection. If no candidate receives over 50% of the primary vote, all the remaining preferences are counted. In the race above, candidate A would have received five points from you as the voter, and candidate E receives one point from you (candidates F, G, & J would receive no points from you). Candidate B would receive four points, C three points, and D two points. Whoever gets the most points after all preferences are counted, wins. (If there were less than 5 candidates running, e.g. 4 candidates, the most points any candidate could receive from you is 4 points.)<sup>5</sup>

### A hypothetical situation with 100 voters (using the proposed system)

For the sake of example let us suppose there are 5 candidates running and all of our voters numbered all of the boxes; one candidate is extremely radical but also has a large support base; he receives 49 first preferences and 51 last preferences. Will he win? It is impossible for him to win with those votes.<sup>6</sup>

49 times 5 equals 245 points  
Plus 51 = 51 points  
Total: 296

In a five candidate race each voter has fifteen points to distribute amongst the candidates. (5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 15) If there are 100 voters, there are 1,500 points to be distributed. If a candidate receives only 296 points out of 1,500, they will lose even if the rest of the points are distributed evenly amongst the other candidates. They will easily lose to a candidate that receives 20 primary votes, 30 second preferences, 20 third preferences, 10 fourth preferences, and 20 last preferences.

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<sup>4</sup> It is something of a cross between a Majority Electoral System (over 50% of the vote) and the Borda count method.

<sup>5</sup> If there was a tie for first place after all the preferences were counted, whoever received the most first preferences (primary votes) would be declared the winner. (And if both candidates received the same number of first preferences, whoever received the most second preferences would be declared the winner. And if it was still a draw, the process would continue with third preferences etc.)

<sup>6</sup> Because they received less than 10% of the total vote. However, the radical would win under the preferential system if they received 49 first preferences, two second preferences, and 49 last preferences. (Under the proposed system they would still have received less than 20% of the vote which means another candidate would get more than 20% of the vote.)

$$20 * 5 = 100$$

$$30 * 4 = 120$$

$$20 * 3 = 60$$

$$10 * 2 = 20$$

$$20 * 1 = 20$$

Total: 320

But with a score of 320 that candidate would probably lose to someone else also. (The modified points preferential system would work best in those states which use winner takes all in the primaries.)

### *The Problem with the Preferential System (Ranked Choice Voting)*

The preferential system looks fair if you only look at the votes which are counted; but once you begin to look at the preferences which are not counted, you begin to realise that there are serious problems with the system.

For the sake of example, let's suppose that 20% of voters gave their primary vote to candidate A, but only 5% of voters gave their primary vote to candidate B. However, 95% of voters gave their second preference to candidate B. Let us also suppose that candidate B receives less primary votes than any other candidate. In this example 80% of voters preferred candidate B to candidate A, but candidate B comes last (none of the preferences allocated to candidate B get counted), and candidate A might go on to win the race (even if candidate A also receives 30% of the last preferences).

To illustrate a further problem with the preferential system, let's suppose that after candidate B drops out, and preferences are distributed, candidate G receives the least number of votes on the second count and therefore drops out of the race. Then F drops out after the third count. Then E drops out after the next count, then D, then C, and then the candidate you voted for, candidate A drops out. Which of your preferences gets counted? Your 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> preferences don't get counted at all. If instead of giving one of those candidates your 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup> preferences, you voted that candidate last, it would have made no difference to you, or them. (Why should the way other people vote determine which of my preferences get counted?) A good system would reflect the popularity and unpopularity of each of the candidates.

### *The Advantages of the Proposed System over the Preferential System*

1. All 5 preferences are counted. (It is also simple and it does not confuse voters.)
2. It measures the popularity and unpopularity of all candidates
3. The count is quick
4. After an election it is easy for candidates to see how popular or unpopular they really were. It might stop some from running again (which just wastes their time and others).
5. It makes it very hard for radicals to be elected. They cannot accumulate preferences (as under the preferential system), or win because better candidates have dropped out of the race.
6. A small hostile block cannot stop a good candidate from being selected. If 25% of voters voted a good candidate last, he or she would still have a good chance of being selected. (e.g. In a ten candidate race with 100 voters, and 25 of the voters voted a candidate last, each of those voters are giving that candidate one point each. If 25 other voters vote that candidate first, they are giving that candidate 10 points each. A small block has no hope of stopping a good candidate under this system.)

#### Note:

When we first identified the problems with the preferential system we devised a similar system to the one suggested above, but in reverse order, so that a number one next to a candidate's name meant that candidate received just one point, and a number 5 next to a candidate's name meant they received 5 points, and the winner was determined by who receives the least marks against them (if no one received over 50% of the primary). The problem with that system is it would mean that the vote could be easily stacked against a good candidate, if they were unpopular with a small percentage of voters. (e.g. if in a five-candidate race with 100 voters, candidate A receives 30 of the primary votes (equalling 30 marks), but just 20 of the voters voted candidate A last, it would mean that they would receive 100 marks against them from those 20 voters alone. The accumulation of so many marks against that candidate's name would make it almost impossible for them to win. With so many last preferences against them, they could probably only win if they received over 50% of the primary vote).

The modified points preferential system must not be made into an optional preferential system where voters can number as many boxes as they wish, as it runs the risk of becoming a glorified first past the post system (many voters would just put a number one in a box), resulting in similar problems to that system.