

Proportional representation with the present constituencies and no additional MLAs

Submitted to the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform by Peter Rastall

A system for proportional representation usually requires that some MLA's be not directly elected (they may be chosen, for example, from lists provided by political parties). If the total number of MLA's is to remain unchanged, this means that the number directly elected must be reduced and that the constituencies be increased in size. Can these consequences be avoided? Is it possible to find an electoral system with the following properties?

1. The number of constituencies is the same as at present.
2. In each constituency one MLA is elected and there are no additional MLA's.
3. The number of MLA's elected by each party is approximately proportional to the total number of votes cast for that party.

At first sight, it seems impossible, but it can be done! The simplest way is to count the votes for each candidate in a constituency, and then to choose the winner by a random process that is weighted proportional to the number of votes. For example, suppose that there are two candidates, the first with 60 percent and the second with 40 percent of the votes. The electoral officer chooses, by some random process, a number between 1 and 100. If the chosen number is between 1 and 60, the first candidate is declared the winner; if it is between 61 and 100, the second candidate is the winner. (To choose the number randomly, the officer might have a bag with 100 counters labeled from 1 to 100, and pick one out without looking.)

In a given constituency, the candidate with most votes will not necessarily win. However, if a party runs candidates in all or most constituencies, the number elected will be roughly proportional to the total number of votes cast for it. An advantage of this system is that every candidate has to run in a constituency – none is chosen from a list of 'qualified persons' provided by a political party.

As a refinement of the system, one might consider eliminating 'fringe candidates': anyone who received less than, say, 5 percent of the vote in a constituency would not be included in the run-off lottery. The system could be used with regular general elections, or with the cyclical-election scheme that I previously proposed ([RASTALL-0072](#)).

Message to the members of the Assembly. I entreat you to remain open to new ideas. In any large group there is a tendency to move to the centre, to adopt bland, average positions. There is also a temptation to second-guess one's audience – to say, "This is a good idea but they would never accept it. Therefore we should not propose it." We, the electorate, are indeed rather conservative. This does not however mean that we favour small, cautious changes. Rather, we prefer not to change anything unless we are presented with a really interesting or exciting alternative. Please do not disappoint us.