Selecting Better Candidates Through Improving the System of Voting

Outlined below is a system of voting that would help political parties select better candidates. But first I will quickly show why the exhaustive system of voting should not be used.[1] (Then after introducing the proposed system I will discuss some of the problems with the preferential system of voting.[2])

The exhaustive system of voting sometimes results in the most popular candidate not making it to the final count.

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

Under the exhaustive system of voting candidate B is out of the race after the first count. 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.

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 the majority of 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.[3]

---

1. 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 and another round of counting begins. Counting continues until one candidate receives a majority of the votes.

2. The preferential system is used in Australia. Under the preferential system only the first preferences (primary votes) are counted first. 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)

3. 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 proposed system looks a lot like a preferential system, but it is not. To explain the proposed system and how it is more reflective of the voters' wishes I will use 10 candidates and you as the voter vote as follows.

Candidate A	1
Candidate B	2
Candidate C	3
Candidate D	4
Candidate E	5
Candidate F	6
Candidate G	7
Candidate H	8
Candidate I	9
Candidate J	10

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 preferences are counted, not just some of the preferences. (But like the preferential system, voters must number all boxes and no numbers can be repeated.) In the 10 candidate race above, candidate A would receive ten points from you as the voter, and candidate J receives one point from you. Candidate B would receive nine points, C eight points etc; whoever gets the most points after all preferences are counted, wins.[4]

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

Suppose one candidate is extremely radical and also has a large support base; he receives 49 first preferences and 51 last preferences in the 10 candidate race. Will he win? It is impossible for him to win with those votes.

49 times 10 equals 490
Plus 51 = 541 points

In a ten candidate race each voter has fifty-five points to distribute amongst the candidates.

10 + 9 + 8 + 7 + 6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 55 (If there are 100 voters, there are 5,500 points to be distributed.)

If a candidate receives only 541 points out of 5,500, 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.

20 * 10 = 200
30 * 9 = 270
20 * 8 = 160
10 * 7 = 70
20 * 1 = 20

Total 720

But with a score of 720 that candidate would probably lose to someone else also.

Under the preferential system of voting, the more candidates you have the more likely it is for a radical to win on preferences. (In the example above, the radical candidate would have won if they just received two less last preferences, and two 2nd preferences.) Under the proposed system of voting, having more candidates does not improve a radical's chance of winning.

To test how well the system works it should first be adopted by the party for the selection of candidates. If it is adopted in the party constitution, and voters are satisfied with the system, it might eventually be adopted by states, and the nation, for the selection of politicians.

The Problem with the Preferential System

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 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th preferences don't get counted at all. If instead of giving one of those candidates your 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, or 6th 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

1. It's simple and it does not confuse voters.
2. All preferences are counted
3. It measures the popularity and unpopularity of all candidates
4. The count is quicker
5. 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).
6. 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.
7. 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.)

Some Caveats:

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 10 next to a candidate's name meant they received 10 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 ten 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 200 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 proposed 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, which would suffer from similar problems to that system.

---

4. If instead of 10 candidates running there were only 6 candidates running, a first preference would be equal to 6 points, and a sixth preference would be equal to one point. 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.)