

Two choice MMP: a good thing for New Zealand

Good for political parties:

This change would work equally well for left wing, right wing, or centrist parties, big or small. They can grow their vote without prejudicing their natural coalition partners, and take seats in parliament when their support is large enough. Major parties no longer have the risk that a potential support party will miss the threshold, and thus be unable to participate in a coalition. This system allows for better alliances between parties. Major parties can encourage alliances with potential support parties, instead of being fearful that a support party may take votes from it that are then

Every tick counts:

A side benefit of this system is that it allows voters to give more information to the political parties about their opinions. The results will show the support for each combination of parties.

- A voter for a major party can 'give a nod' to another party through their second choice.
- Minor parties will have an indication of their voters preference between major parties. Truly loyal voters can choose the same party twice.

This means that the extra tick demanded of voters is truly useful. It helps make sure that every voter's vote counts, but also provides useful information on how the voters see common interests between parties

This change can please everybody:

The threshold can stay AND Every party vote can count

Adaptable:

This system works equally well with any size of threshold, and whether or winning an electorate seat passes

Robust:

This system is robust. A voter may make only a first choice, only a second choice, or first and second choices, and a vote for a qualifying party counts

NZ leads the world.....again

Another benefit of this system is that NZ would be able to show the world a simple, working system of proportional representation that has a very high degree of proportionality while still avoiding a proliferation of tiny parties in its representative assembly.

There is nothing new under the sun:

Ideas very like this were included in numerous submissions to the 2012 MMP review.

Unfortunately they do not seem to have received any serious consideration, and are mentioned only briefly in the final report, incorrectly categorized under "Other Issues: Use of a preference voting system for electorate contests".

More information on:

www.twochoicemmp.wordpress.com

Summary

Two-choice MMP is the simple solution to the threshold problem.

- It keeps MMP and the threshold.
- It allows voters to support minor parties without threshold anxiety.
- It asks only one more 'tick' from voters, while largely eliminating the problem of wasted votes.
- It is simple to understand and to implement.

New Zealand MMP:
How to solve the
threshold
problem

Two-choice MMP

Keep the 5% threshold
AND
Have every vote count

31 October
2020

The threshold in summary: To get seats in parliament, a party must gain an electorate seat, or 5% of the party vote.

The good:

A threshold prevents having many small parties in parliament.

Thus the parliament should be more stable

The bad:

When a party falls short of the threshold, all its votes are wasted, If it falls just short, 5% of all votes are wasted, perhaps changing the result of the election.

Crises of government can arise when a small number of disputed votes change the election result.

Typically 10% of votes are wasted each election

Therefore people are reluctant to vote for small parties (threshold anxiety)

Many people don't vote, because new parties have little chance of success.

The challenge:

How to keep the good of the threshold, and avoid the bad.

Here's a plan:

1. Add a second choice column for party votes:
2. Voters choose a first choice party. And if they want choose a second choice party.
3. When a party does not pass the threshold on first choice votes, votes for that party go to each voter's second choice party. For a second choice people would normally choose a party more certain to pass the threshold.
4. After this, votes are counted and seats distributed in the same manner as at present

Place a tick in the circle after the name of your second choice party.

Vote by placing a tick in the circle before the name of the candidate you choose.

1 st choice	2 nd choice	Electorate (MP)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> party	party <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALLEN, Fred Labour
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> BARKER, Mary ACT NEW ZEALAND
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> DENIS, Alistair NATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ELLIS, John ALLIANCE
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> GREIG, Tony
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> THE GREENS:

This is what a two-choice voting paper might look like

Why do this:

- It is a simple way to keep the threshold and make sure every party vote can count.
- It drastically reduces the number of wasted votes.
- People can vote for second parties without "threshold anxiety" - the risk of wasting their vote.
- It eliminates the crises that can result if a party misses the threshold by a small margin.
- It both keeps the threshold and eliminates its faults.

Those benefits will in turn:

- Encourage new ideas and parties because people can vote for them while being sure of having a say in the make-up of parliament.
- Encourage more people to vote because their votes have more meaning.

Existing MMP: threshold issues

The Problem

In a NZ general election the issue of the threshold is a dominant question in trying to predict the makeup of parliament after the election.

It seems conventional wisdom that the threshold is necessary to avoid having a number of single-MP parties represented in parliament with a resulting risk of instability.

The threshold has some important downsides. The most significant is that of wasted votes, especially if a party or parties miss the threshold by a small margin. Passing the threshold or not can easily change the government. It is never a good idea to have a system where a single vote difference can make a huge change to the result. It can result in constitutional crises where the validity of each vote gets disputed.

Because of this problem, voters may suffer from 'threshold anxiety', the worry that if they vote for a small party, their chosen party may miss the threshold, thus wasting their vote and possibly changing the result of the election. These people avoid the risk by voting for a major party. This threshold anxiety thus interferes with one of the real benefits of MMP, that of allowing new parties to develop and grow.

This document proposes a small change to the electoral system to eliminate the threshold problem. It does this by allowing voters to make a second choice of party vote, this to be used in the event that the first choice party does not cross the threshold.

This minimal use of preferences is just enough to largely eliminate wasted votes. This keeps the system simple, easy to understand and implement. Each person will know exactly where their vote has been counted.

Under the present system, party votes results might look like this

Party	Vote%	Electorates won?	Seats%
Major party A	47	y	49
Major party B	43	y	45
Minor party C	5.00%	n	6
Other parties	5.00%	n	0

Here party C has just scraped in to meet the 5% threshold. Parties B and C have between them 51% of the votes counted and can form a coalition government.

But if party C gained just a few fewer votes, the result would change:

Party	Vote%	Electorates won?	Seats%
Major party A	47	y	52
Major party B	43	y	48
Minor party C	4.99%	n	0
Other parties	5.01%	n	0

Major party A would have a clear majority in parliament, because by chance party C just missed the threshold.

A situation like this poses a number of problems:

- It may become necessary to analyse every vote cast to check exactly which votes were valid, in order to decide whether the 5% was passed, and hence the result of the election.
- Voters will be discouraged from supporting small parties, because of threshold anxiety (fear of vote being wasted and so changing the result of the election).
- Evolution of politics will be hindered, because new parties find it very difficult to get established.

Two choice MMP: Threshold without wasted votes

In a situation where the threshold is considered important, abolishing it is not a solution. Reducing the threshold only makes a small difference.

This is where two-choice party voting offers a simple solution.

Two-choice party voting involves the following:

Add a column to the voting paper. Here is what a voting paper might look like.

For this example, if parties B and C are aligned, most party C voters would choose party B as their second choice. And many supporters of other parties will have expressed second choices, perhaps supporting the major parties equally.

The results might look like this

Party	1st choice vote%	Electorates won?	Second Choices applied	Effective votes	Seats%
Major party A	47	y	+2	49	49
Major party B	43	y	+5+2	50	51
Minor party C	5.00%	n	-5	0	0
Other parties	5.00%	n	-4	0	0

Here you have a result that is still close, but where almost every vote participates in the result. Only those who made both first and second choices for non-threshold parties had their votes 'wasted'.

This system has some costs, mainly a slightly more complicated voting paper, but one that still only requires 2 ticks, but where a third tick is permitted and useful.

This minor change offers some considerable benefits:

- It keeps the threshold, which many consider important.
- It allows every voter to be sure their vote will count.
- It eliminates 'threshold anxiety' for voters and parties.

As well as these benefits, the system is robust.

- A voting paper with only one party tick is still valid.
- A voting paper with first and second choices for the same party is still valid.
- There is no risk that one vote can significantly change the makeup of parliament.