

How to solve the NZ MMP threshold problem

1. Give every voter a *second choice* of party, like this:

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"/>	LABOUR	<input type="checkbox"/>	ALLEN, Fred Labour
<input type="checkbox"/>	ACT NEW ZEALAND	<input type="checkbox"/>	BARKER, Mary ACT NEW ZEALAND
<input type="checkbox"/>	NATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	DENIS, Alistair NATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	ALLIANCE	<input type="checkbox"/>	ELLIS, John ALLIANCE
<input type="checkbox"/>	THE GREENS:	<input type="checkbox"/>	GREIG, Tony

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

2. If the *first choice* party misses the threshold, the vote goes to the *second choice* party.

That's it. Everything else stays the same. Problem solved.

For voters:

I can support a small party AND be sure of having a vote that counts.

My vote will count provided that one of my choices is for a party that passes the threshold.

The idea of a second choice is easy to understand.

For vote counting:

Count first choices first.

Second choices can be counted later.

Getting main results out should not take any longer than now.

Seat allocation process is unchanged.

System is robust against voter error.

The results table can be simple and informative.

For small parties:

Voters can support small parties without risk of their vote being wasted.

Small parties are not disadvantaged by voter fear of wasted votes.

For big parties:

No risk of votes for potential coalition partners being wasted.

For parliament:

The threshold is retained so there will be no proliferation of small parties.

For safety of results:

A party missing the threshold by a tiny amount can no longer change the election result, so there is no risk of a situation where every last vote may be disputed.

The system is much more proportional, because every vote can count, and voters are not influenced by risk of wasted votes.

This change eliminates a significant barrier to small parties and to the proportionality of the MMP system.

For New Zealand in the world:

Leading again.

More details over the page and on www.twochoicemmp.wordpress.com

Threshold problems

Wasted votes

When a party misses the threshold, votes for that party have been wasted. Those voters play no part in choosing the next government. The make-up of parliament is less proportional that it could be.

Threshold anxiety

Threshold anxiety - the fear of votes being wasted through missing a threshold - is a major negative influence on voters. Voting decisions are distorted. Also, major parties are wary of small support parties,

which may take votes from them and then have those votes wasted by missing the threshold.

Cliff-edges

Cliff edges are where a party may pass or miss the threshold by just a few votes. The US presidential election had lots of them. Just missing or not the threshold may change the government. So there is a real risk of dispute over the validity of every vote.

Two-choice MMP explained

Why go with this?

When someone's vote is nullified by the operation of a threshold, those voters should have a say.

Two-choice MMP does this. It is the simplest method of eliminating the faults of a threshold, without losing its benefits. It is a simplified form of a transferable vote. It only exists to deal with the potentially wasted votes that arrive from a threshold. If the threshold were ever abandoned, the second choice would no longer be needed.

The voting paper

There are several ways that a two party choices could be provided for on the voting paper. Here it is proposed that a second column be added to the party vote section. Other ways of recording a second choice are possible.

Voting strategy

Most voters wanting to support a minor party as first choice, would choose a major party for their second choice. But voters would be free to choose any two parties, or even just one. Or give both choices to just one party. If both choices are for parties that do not pass the threshold, then neither will contribute to deciding the government.

Robustness

This system is very robust against voter error. If a voter places a tick against only one party, intent is clear. As long as there is a tick against a party that passes the threshold, that vote can count.

Vote counting

For manual vote counting, voting papers would be first sorted by first choices, then by second choice. The results would then give a vote

count for each combination of first and second choice party.

In a manual process first choices would be counted first, with second choices later. In this way election night results would take no longer than at present.

Results tables would be able to show in varying levels of detail, how first choice votes for non-threshold parties have been replaced by second choices. Here is a sample table. It shows a hypothetical example where wasted votes are reduced from 15% to 2%.

The final vote counts for each qualifying party would then be used to

Party	1st choice votes%	2nd choice votes%	Final votes%
Party A	40	+6	46
Party B	40	+6	46
Party C	5	+1	6
Others	15 (non-threshold)	-13(transfer)	2(wasted)
Total	100%		100%

allocate seats in parliament using the same methodology as at present.

Other uses of results

After an election, the complete results table, with a vote count for each first choice/second choice combination could give useful further insights into voter preferences.

The MMP review

Many submissions to the 2012 MMP review suggested that some form of second choice be offered to voters whose preferred party missed the 5% threshold.

The final report briefly noted them without further evaluation.

And the results?

No wasted votes and no threshold anxiety

Two-choice MMP would mean that no vote need be wasted. Every voter can express support for a small party as well as having their vote count towards deciding the next government.

No cliff-edges

No longer is there any risk of the result of an election being dependent on whether one party has passed the threshold or not, when its votes are very close to the 5% threshold.

No proliferation of small parties in parliament

The threshold would still be there and doing its job of avoiding a proliferation of small parties in parliament.

One more tick, but a very useful one

Two-choice MMP keeps the threshold while also largely eliminating its problems.