

STV FOR WESTMINSTER

The accompanying map illustrates how well proportional representation using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) could work for the UK Parliament. This proposal¹, which was put forward in the House of Commons by the Liberal Democrats as an amendment to the 2009/10 Constitutional Reform Bill, is a fully worked out scheme that could be implemented immediately.

Constituencies are based entirely on local authority areas, mostly electing 4 or 5 MPs; this gives a high level of proportionality, while maintaining a strong local connection. In England and Wales it is based as far as possible on traditional (“ceremonial”) counties.

Such a scheme can combine the usual advantages of STV, including . . .

- votes are cast for individuals not party lists;
- there are no safe seats, so every vote matters;
- the great majority of voters end up with at least one MP they voted for;
- the overall result is broadly proportional, at least among parties attracting around 15% support or more;
- minority parties and independents can get elected if they can attract a similar level of support locally;
- it is more difficult for extremist parties, because they tend not to be anyone’s second preference

. . . with some additional advantages:

- the larger size of constituencies is compensated for by their being natural areas with which voters will find it easier to identify;
- boundaries would need to be changed only very rarely; population changes can instead be accommodated by changing the number of MPs for the constituency;
- it is very easy to keep up-to-date, using the current year’s electoral register;
- the overall size of Parliament could be significantly reduced; the scheme shown on the map is based on a maximum of 100,000 electors per MP, to give a total of just over 500 MPs, about 20% fewer than in the present Parliament.

¹For more details see <http://www.ma.hw.ac.uk/~denis/stv4uk/>