

Inclusive voting



Voting systems vary greatly in what bias they have but many people assume whoever gets an arithmetic majority of seats or votes can do whatever they want, irrespective of sizeable minorities; this can be labelled 'majoritarianism'. The two electoral voting systems known or used in Northern Ireland are;

1) **First past the post** (British Westminster elections); whoever gets the top number of votes gets elected even if it is only, say, 20% of the total votes (if no one else received more). It is very unrepresentative and leads to large 'swings'; it discriminates against minorities/minority parties. UK referendums are on the same basis except where there are 2 options 50% + 1 wins.

2) **PR-STV** - Proportional Representation by Single Transferable Vote; this gives a much fairer result in that the percentage of seats approximates to the percentage of votes. Can also be used in decision making. However parties can still succeed by appealing only to their section of society. Used in NI Assembly and Dáil elections in the Republic.

There are many other voting systems internationally with varying outcomes.

However 'inclusive' voting mechanisms are available including the Modified Borda Count. These can be used for voting for people or for decision making in groups. These systems are more nuanced and reward 'reaching out' to people for whom the candidate/option is not necessarily their first choice – they therefore reward cooperation and collaboration.

The way they work is that, to maximise their vote on either candidates in an election or policy options (in a referendum or in an organisation), those voting should vote for all options in order of their choice – 1, 2, 3 etc according to how many candidates/options there are. If someone votes for, say, all 10 candidates/options then their No. 1 gets 10 points. If they only vote for 3 candidates/options then their top choice only gets 3 points. And if they only vote for one then that/they only get 1 point.

This means those wanting to succeed need to reach out to others, outside their immediate supporters or supporters of any one policy. It is more inclusive, nuanced and representative.

In decision making by inclusive voting, all options are discussed and summarised by their supporters (no writing loaded options). Inclusive voting works where there are 3 or more options. It can't work miracles and there may be a clear decision or there may not, and if not then either a compromise between leading options may be possible, further discussion needs to take place, or simply nothing should happen for the moment on this issue concerned.

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There is lots more information available at www.deborda.org and the tools for voting at <https://debordavote.com/> There are also various learned (and unfortunately expensive) books by Peter Emerson, director of the de Borda Institute, including the mathematics and many of the disasters to which majoritarian voting has led (e.g. an undefined 'Brexit' on a very slim arithmetic majority in 2016).