

***“One aim of an electoral system is to provide fair representation”***

Evaluate the effectiveness of an electoral system you have studied in providing fair representation. You should refer to electoral systems you have used in Scotland or the UK or both in your answer.

Single Transferable Vote (STV) is an electoral system used in local government elections in Scotland. There are 32 local authorities in Scotland and each is split into wards within it, these wards have many elected councilors as STV is a multi-member system. It can be argued that as STV allows for greater voter choice as voters can vote for multiple candidates as well as choose within parties. Voters rank candidates in order of preference and parties may stand multiple candidates, therefore voters can rank party candidates in order of preference. For example a voter in Clydebank Central may vote for one of two Labour Candidates as their first choice, putting the second Labour Candidate as their second choice. This allows for greater voter choice, allowing fairer representation, as a voter can vote for their preferred candidate as well as their preferred party. In contrast FPTP the system used for UK general elections only allows one candidate per party, this restricts voter choice as a voter may want a Labour MP but not like Gemma Doyle MP for West Dunbartonshire. The voter may vote for her just because she is the only Labour candidate available. On the other hand the complexity of the STV system in calculating a result due to multiple candidates may be bad for representation as if voters do not understand the electoral process, it can undermine democracy.

Another reason it can be argued that STV provides fair representation is that smaller parties have a better chance of being elected under the system. STV is a PR system and as such it provides a much closer correlation between the % of a vote a party gains and the % of the seats they receive. This gives smaller parties a better chance of representation as they are more likely to gain seats if they are able to obtain at least the quota needed. This is clearly fair as a party may have widespread support but not enough to come first in the ballot and under a system such as FPTP there are no seats for second place, therefore they would never gain representation. STV allows them to gain representation. On the other hand it could be said that as STV gives better representation of smaller parties this could allow extremist minority parties such as the BNP to make progress however some would argue that this is only fair as we live in a democracy and that the BNP should have some form of representation.

It can be argued however that STV is less fair compared to other electoral systems as it most commonly results in a coalition government, a government made up of multiple parties, which voters do not vote for. Voters vote for candidates who they hope will make up the next government however under STV the next government is likely to be a coalition made up of other parties as it is unlikely a single party will dominate under the STV electoral system. This is unfair because voters do not vote for coalitions and do not get a say in who forms a coalition. For example in over a quarter of Scottish councils Labour is in coalition with the Conservative party

something that would likely outrage voters if it were to happen at a national level. Under other systems such as the FPTP electoral system coalitions are very unlikely and in contrast a strong single party government is usually produced. However it could be argued that as FPTP usually provides a majority result for a party with less than a majority of the vote that it is more unfair in terms of what voters want. Coalitions can also provide more parties representation within government and allow for compromises to be made, representing more voter views which is clearly fairer.