

# **The Alternative Vote will turn second-choice politicians into winners**

**by Francis Bennion**

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For full version of abbreviations click 'Abbreviations' on FB's website

SIR – The argument of Lord Aldington and others is based on the proposition that under the Alternative Vote the winning candidate will have to 'work harder to achieve more than 50 per cent of the vote'. This is not true.

Suppose there is a by-election in a constituency where there are three candidates A, B and C. The votes (that is first preferences) are: A 10,000, B 9,000, C 8,000. Under First Past the Post A would have been declared victorious. However, B wins under AV.

Let's say that the total votes are 27,000, so to get more than 50 per cent the winner needs 13,501. As A has fewer than this, the distribution of second votes swings into action. C is deleted. The voters for C gave A 3,100 second preference votes and B 4,600. These are added to their original votes, so the result is: A 13,100 and B 13,600. B is declared the winner.

AV has delivered a dishonest result because it has given second preferences an equal value with first preferences.

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[*Note by FB* The actual text of my letter as sent to the *Daily Telegraph* was somewhat different. It ran as follows:

SIR – The letter signed by Lord Aldington and others (Letters, 11 March 2011) is based on the proposition that under AV the winning candidate must achieve 'more than 50 per cent of the vote'. This proposition is not true.

Suppose there is a by-election under AV for a constituency where there are three candidates A, B and C. The votes (that is first preferences) are: A 10,000, C 9,000, B 8,000. So on first past the post A would have been declared elected. However C is declared elected under AV.

The total votes are 27,000, so to get more than 50 per cent the winner needs 13,501. As A has fewer than this, AV swings into action. B is deleted. The voters for B gave A 3,100 second preferences and C 4,600 second preferences. These are added to their original votes, so that the result is: A 13,100 and C 13,600. C now has more than half the votes so is declared the winner.

AV has delivered a dishonest result because it has given second preferences an equal value with first preferences. They do not in fact have an equal value because each is a second-best choice. Every voter whose second preferences were counted in wanted B elected rather than their second preference A or C.

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This reduced 231 words to 180 at a cost of leaving out the final two explanatory sentences (though this was compensated for by the lengthy title put collectively on the letter as printed with three other letters). It would have been a slightly greater reduction if the unnecessary and mistaken words 'Let's say that' had not been inserted. The incorrect reduction of 'Budleigh Salterton' to 'Salterton' is inexplicable.]

## **References**

None