

Single Transferable Vote

District magnitude – The number of members elected in an electoral district. In First-Past-the-Post and majority systems, the district magnitude is always one. In proportional representation and mixed systems, the district magnitude is always greater than one.

Proportionality – A match between seat share (the product of an electoral system) and vote share (the direct expression of the electorate's preferences). Proportionality is commonly seen to be a principle of fairness.

Ordinal ballot – A ballot that allows or requires voters to rank candidates as their first preference, second preference, and so on. This type of ballot is used, among others, in the Alternative Vote system in Australia and the Single Transferable Vote system in Ireland. Also called preferential ballot.

Surplus votes – Votes a candidate receives beyond the total necessary to win a seat. Surplus votes have a practical effect only in Single Transferable Vote systems, where votes for any candidate that exceed the quota in one count are reallocated on the basis of next preferences to other candidates; see transfer of preferences.

Transfer of preferences – Part of the counting procedure when ordinal ballots are treated as single transferable votes. It involves reallocating votes for the last-place candidate (and surplus votes in some systems) among the remaining candidates according to the next preference marked on each ballot. In Alternative Vote, the first transfer takes place if no candidate has secured a majority in the first count, and the process continues until someone has acquired a majority of the ballots. In Single Transferable Vote, the transfer begins if not all the seats have been filled by candidates whose first preference votes exceeded the quota, and it continues until all available seats have been filled in this manner, or until no more transfers can be made. Also called distribution of preferences.