Understanding the Single Transferable Vote (STV) System

The STV system is a type of proportional representation used in Scottish local government elections. It ensures that as many votes as possible contribute to electing a candidate. Here's how it works:

1. Multi-Member Wards: Each electoral area, or ward, elects multiple councillors (usually 3 or 4). This allows for broader representation of different political views.
2. Ranking Candidates: Voters rank candidates in order of preference. You put a "1" next to your most preferred candidate, a "2" next to your second choice, a "3" next to your third, and so on. You can rank as many or as few candidates as you like.
3. Quota and Transfers:
   3.1. To win, a candidate must reach a set number of votes known as the quota. This is calculated based on the total number of votes cast and the number of seats available.
   3.2. If a candidate reaches the quota on the first count (i.e., they receive enough first-preference votes), they are elected. Any votes they receive beyond the quota are transferred to the next preferred candidate on those ballots.
   3.3. If no candidate reaches the quota, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and their votes are transferred to the next preference listed on those ballots. This process repeats until all seats are filled.

Why Vote for a Smaller Party Like Reform?

1.   Support for Your Preferred Policies: By giving your "1" vote to Reform, a smaller party, you show support for the policies that align closely with your views. Even if Reform doesn't win, your vote signals to larger parties that there is significant backing for Reform's positions.

2.   No Wasted Votes: In STV, if Reform doesn't receive enough votes to be elected or is eliminated during the counting process, your vote isn't wasted. Instead, it transfers to your next preferred candidate. This means your vote still contributes to the outcome, even if it doesn't help your first choice.

3.   Influence Political Strategies: A strong showing for Reform, even if they don't win a seat, can influence Labour or the Conservatives to consider adopting some of Reform's policies to attract more voters in future elections.

Using Your 2nd, 3rd, 4th Preferences to Prevent the SNP from Winning

1. Strategic Use of Preferences:
   1.1. After ranking Reform as your first choice, you can rank other candidates in order of preference. For example, if you want to prevent the SNP from winning a seat, you should rank all the other candidates you prefer before the SNP.
   1.2. By doing this, even if Reform is eliminated, your vote will transfer to another candidate who is more acceptable to you than the SNP.
2. Minimise the Chances of an Unwanted Outcome:
   2.1. By using your 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc., preferences, you ensure that if Reform or another preferred candidate is eliminated, your vote still goes towards helping Labour or the Conservatives — whom you see as better choices than the SNP — potentially blocking the SNP from winning a seat.

Practical Example

Consider a ward with four candidates: Alice (Reform), Bob (Labour), Charlie (Conservative), and Diana (SNP). You strongly support Reform and definitely do not want the SNP to win. Here's how you might vote:

•   1 for Alice (Reform) - Your top choice, the party most aligned with your views.

- 2 for Charlie (Conservative) - A larger party that you prefer over Labour and the SNP.

- 3 for Bob (Labour) - A party you prefer over the SNP, but less so than the Conservatives.

- Leave Diana (SNP) blank or rank her last - As you do not want the SNP to win.

In this scenario:

- If Alice (Reform) does not get enough votes and is eliminated, your vote transfers to Charlie (Conservative), your second preference.

- If Charlie has enough votes to stay in the running or get elected, your vote could then transfer to Bob (Labour) if necessary, to keep Diana (SNP) from winning a seat.

- This strategy ensures that your vote is always contributing towards electing a candidate you prefer over the SNP.

Conclusion

The Single Transferable Vote system allows you to vote for a smaller party like Reform, which aligns closely with your views, without fear of wasting your vote. By ranking your preferences, you can ensure that if your first choice doesn't win, your vote still helps to elect candidates you find more acceptable than the SNP. This strategic use of preferences allows you to influence the election outcome positively and prevent an unwanted candidate from gaining a seat.