

Amnesty International members only
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2022 GLOBAL ASSEMBLY MEETING PAPER REFORMING THE VOTING MODEL FOR INTERNATIONALLY ELECTED POSITIONS

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Aim:

The aim of this paper is to enable the Global Assembly (GA) to reach an informed decision about reforming the voting model for internationally elected positions.

This document provides a summary of the key findings and relevant issues supporting the motion that will be presented to the 2022 Global Assembly for decision by the International Board.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective and intention

The aim of this paper is to enable the Global Assembly (GA) reach an informed decision about changing the voting model for internationally elected positions on Amnesty International's global governance bodies¹ from a First Past the Post (FPTP) system to a Single Transferable Vote (STV).

Under the current FPTP system candidates who receive the highest number of votes are elected. Standing Representatives can vote for as many or as few candidates as there are vacancies. Voters are not required to exercise preferences. In elections held under the STV model, Standing Representatives can vote for as many or as few candidates as they wish. Each Standing Representative may rank candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference (1, 2, 3 etc.). Candidates who receive the highest proportion of votes win.

This paper outlines the advantages and disadvantages with both models. It also demonstrates how changing the current electoral system to STV is more closely aligned with Amnesty International's organizational values.

Background

The decision to reform the voting model for internationally elected positions was mandated to the International Board by the GA. Specifically, the 2018 GA meeting instructed the International Board to *"evaluate preferential and other voting models and present options for consideration to the 2019 Global Assembly meeting, to be used for all subsequent elections to the International Board and all internationally elected positions."*

The International Board presented options for consideration at the 2019 GA Meeting and was subsequently tasked with recommending an alternative option. The Governance Innovation Group (GIG) used the following evaluation criteria to narrow down these choices:

- Fairness
- Legitimacy
- Inclusiveness
- Engagement
- Accessibility
- Electorate size
- Administration

Conclusion

After reviewing the GIG's research and analysis the International Board decided to submit a motion to the GA recommending the current voting model should be replaced with a new preferential system of voting. The preferential model considered in this paper is STV.

Based on discussions with the GIG, the International Nominations Committee (INC) the

¹ The global governance bodies include the International Board, the Global Assembly Preparatory Committee, the Finance and Audit Committee, the International Nominations Committee and the Membership Review Committee

Governance Programme and feedback from the Regional Forum meetings, the International Board recognizes that changing the voting model alone will not lead to a more equitable representation or enhance the diversity of candidates standing for election in Amnesty International's governance. Broader questions relating to equity, diversity, inclusion and representation need to be constructively addressed alongside the issue of Board reform thereby helping turn the vision set out by the GA's decision into a movement-wide reality.

Ultimately, the International Board acknowledges that the benefits of changing the voting model will only be realized by attracting and finding skilled and diverse talent (internally and externally), elevating the experience of governance and increasing the number of candidates standing for election to strengthen Amnesty International's global leadership and governance. Nevertheless, it believes changing the voting model will result in a fairer and more democratic electoral system and help to strengthen the legitimacy of Amnesty International's global governance leadership.

Reforming the voting model for internationally elected positions

INTRODUCTION

In 2018 the Global Assembly (GA) asked the International Board to consider changing the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system to a new method when electing all globally elected positions on the International Board and the organization's statutory committees.

As mandated by 2018 GA Decision 7, the International Board presented preferential and other voting models for consideration in a workshop at the 2019 GA Meeting (see ORG 50/0386/2019 "*Considerations for the complete nomination to election process for internationally elected positions*"). A clear consensus was not reached on how the group wanted to proceed other than to request further information and the involvement of those with specific subject knowledge to help narrow down the options.

Having carried out the necessary research, the International Board recommends changing the existing voting model to one that is fairer and more democratic and will ultimately strengthen the legitimacy of Amnesty International's governance system. This change will also ensure the movement's leadership elections are more closely aligned to Amnesty International's organizational values and its commitment to fairness, openness, equity and inclusion.

BACKGROUND

The origins of Amnesty International's election cycle for global governance positions are rooted in a 1963 International Council Meeting (ICM) Decision when the International Executive Committee (now the International Board) was first founded. It has become the model for elections to be held at all International Council and Global Assembly (GA) meetings ever since.

Following the governance reform measures, approved in 2017 (one Section - one Vote, increased staggering of International Board terms), there has been significant movement interest in leadership culture and electing leaders with the required knowledge, competencies and experience to lead the organization. However, forming an International Board and international committees with high-calibre and diverse candidates in the context of a yearly rather than a biennial meeting cycle poses significant challenges. The work required behind the scenes to run a successful nominations and elections process has effectively doubled. In addition the shift towards staggered terms (first approved in 2009), holding more frequent elections for international board and committee members and the increased demand for rigour in assessing candidates to fill these vacancies highlights a need to evaluate the effects of the implementation of the 2017 governance reforms from a fresh standpoint.

The shift to an annual cycle and a shorter meeting has also changed the character of the GA from its predecessor, the ICM. The GA has become a more focused and strategic meeting aimed at building support for new initiatives and fostering improved accountability. The elections process is an important component of the GA's decision-making mandate and with a shorter meeting annually it is important that candidates are elected fairly and efficiently.

CURRENT MODEL

The current election model either online or by ballot is first-past-the-post (FPTP) where voters have one vote per position. The candidates with the most votes are elected. The electorate is

composed of the membership entities of the movement – in 2020 there were 63 entities with membership status which increased to 64 in 2021.

The electorate is much reduced since the original motion was submitted to the GA in 2018. Before the introduction of the one-section-one-vote GA model in 2017 sections were granted a varying number of votes according to the size of their membership. In 2017 there were 209 voters resulting in a total number of 836 votes available for the four candidates who stood for election to the International Board that year. Given the smaller electorate size today, it is both timely and relevant to find a new voting model that accurately represents the electorate's range of views and perspectives. Compared to FPTP there are fairer voting methods that will ensure the election of every candidate matches the votes they receive, which is not currently the case (see table and appendix below). Adopting a new voting model will help to address some of the shortcomings associated with FPTP.

The shift to online elections in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic has further opened up new possibilities of exploring alternative voting models that were previously ruled out due to the complexity of administering them by in-person ballot. Online voting is also better suited to tied situations which demand a longer electoral process than can be managed within the time constraints of a two-day GA meeting. Since their introduction, voter participation in International Board elections has remained high at 92.3% and latest GA evaluation feedback shows that 95% of respondents trust the results. Voter turnout in online elections is also higher than in-person voting at previous ICM's.²

INTERNATIONAL BOARD TRANSITIONAL MEASURES

From 2022 onwards the GA will elect one third of the International Board every year (assuming the current annual governance cycle is maintained). During the past few elections, the candidate pool for International Board places has been small and given that elections are to be held annually, is likely to remain so. Only a few voting models researched by the Governance Innovation Group (GIG) on behalf of the International Board seemed appropriate for a small electorate deciding from a limited pool of candidates.

INTERNATIONAL TREASURER AND GA CHAIR

As part of its research the GIG considered whether the voting model used for the GA Chair and the International Treasurer positions should be different from other elected positions because they are individually elected. The International Treasurer is the only International Board member elected for their specific skillset and separately to other board candidates. Equally, the GA Chair is the only position with a different role description to other members of the GA Preparatory Committee and is elected separately from the Committee. In the GA Chair election in 2018 this post attracted two candidates and the election was a straight run-off; in 2021 there was only one candidate.

In an election where there are only two options to decide between, voting is simple. The candidate with the majority of the votes is elected. However, when there are more than two options it's possible that none of the options will be supported by a majority. To know which

² Based on election data for International Board elections in 2015 and 2017

candidate is supported by a majority of voters an alternative voting method is required.

VOTING SYSTEMS COMPARED

The table below offers a comparison between the current FPTP system and the proposed Single Transferable Vote (STV) model. STV was selected based on the following criteria:

- Fairness
- Legitimacy
- Inclusiveness
- Engagement
- Accessibility
- Electorate size
- Administration

FPTP is demonstrably less representative than other major voting methods (unless there are only two candidates). The table in the Appendix shows how mathematically, voting systems can be evaluated according to the criteria of fairness. Compared to FPTP, STV allows voters to rank their first preference without "wasting" their vote. It is inclusive and extremely effective at accounting for the will of voters because it records all voter preferences beyond simply their first preference, which is the only question addressed by FPTP.

Preferential models³

Preferential voting models are used by governments or organizations to put more power into the hands of voters. A variety of different technical modalities can be used to implement a preferential voting system. The overall model works by asking the electorate to rank candidates in order of preference by marking 1, 2, 3 and so on. Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they like or vote for only one candidate. Changing to a new preferential model would require amending article 8.1.12 of the Global Governance Regulations.

The preferential model considered in this paper is STV. The main advantage of STV over FPTP is that it encourages the expression of honest voter preferences and fosters legitimate representation. By knowing their vote will likely transfer to their second or third choice, voters are assured there is no possibility of "wasting" their vote.

STV has been mainly adopted in English-speaking countries such as Australia, Ireland, Malta and in local government, city, state and indirect elections in India, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, UK and the USA. Many organizations around the world also use STV in their elections believing it to be vital to business integrity. One of the main drawbacks with STV (and highlighted by Regional Forum attendees) is that preference voting is unfamiliar in many societies and administering an STV count can be quite complex. However, these issues will be addressed by engaging with Amnesty entities before elections are held in 2023 to fully answer any questions arising and by administering the vote online.

³ Preferential models are also known as ranked-choice voting systems and have various different technical implementation modalities: e.g. alternative voting; supplementary vote; single transferable vote; instant run-off; Borda count

Voting Model	Advantages	Disadvantages
FPTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to understand • Simple to administer • Quick to count votes and declare results after voting has closed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly suited to a two-candidate system • Candidates can be elected without winning a majority of the vote • Votes are 'wasted' • Restricts voter choice • Incentivizes tactical voting • No guarantee that the candidates with the desired competencies needed to fill a governance vacancy will be elected
STV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each vote has equal value • Fewer wasted votes than FPTP • Suitable for elections of more than two candidates • Allows voters to rank their preferred candidates without worrying about splitting the vote • Reduces the possibility of tactical voting thereby introducing a more reflective voting culture⁴ • Produces fairer results⁵. Ensures that all elected candidates are elected as an expression of a larger number of votes (via second, third, and fourth preferences)⁶ and strengthens legitimacy • Possible to conduct multiple rounds of elections without needing to ask voters to fill out more than one ballot⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No guarantee that the candidates with the desired competencies needed to fill a governance vacancy will be elected • Regions that usually put forward more candidates for election are likely to have their candidates elected irrespective of the voting model⁸ • INC will have to always find more candidates than there are places available

BEST ALTERNATIVE OPTION

As outlined in this paper, it is expected that changing the voting system will help to ensure that candidates are elected in proportion to the share of the votes they receive. It also means every vote is of equal value and that everyone will have an equal voice in the elections process. Changing the voting system will help to strengthen the legitimacy of the results and the link

⁴ 2018 Global Assembly Meeting Motion, AI Canada (English): Motion on a Preferential Voting Model

⁵ <https://www.opavote.com/methods/ranked-choice-voting>

⁶ INC paper, "Voting Culture and Electoral System at General Assembly Meetings", March 2018

⁷ 2018 Global Assembly Meeting Motion, AI Canada (English): Motion on a Preferential Voting Model

⁸ INC paper, "Voting Culture and Electoral System at General Assembly Meetings", March 2018

between the movement and its elected leaders.

A key determinant in choosing a voting model is the ease with how it is administered and used by voters (see table above). In terms of process the STV model would still feel very similar to the voter. It is oriented towards encouraging the electorate to choose multiple candidates on a single ballot and picking a balanced team which fits well with INC processes. It should be noted that **the current practice of meeting International Board candidates will be retained** regardless of whichever voting method is used.

CONSIDERING A NEW METHOD ALONGSIDE A MOTION ON BOARD REFORM

In both the GIG and INC's opinion changing the voting model will have little effect incentivising external candidates to come forward, though it may encourage a wider range of internal candidates to consider standing for election. External candidates are (generally speaking) less interested in political campaigning and are more likely to come forward if they are appointed rather than having to stand for election before an unknown audience. They also face an inherently uneven playing field and new measures must be introduced to ensure competitive neutrality with internal candidates. Should the GA consider it to be advantageous to appoint rather than elect a certain number of International Board positions, this change could be considered by the International Board alongside proposed reforms to the voting model and election cycle.

In either scenario, performing a talent gap analysis is an essential tool that is used to identify and fill the relevant competency and diversity gaps on each governance body. In 2019 the INC encouraged candidates from Asia to apply and three candidates from that region were successfully elected to the International Board. Moving to a fairer voting model will enable the electorate to take these gaps into account when exercising their vote in order to build competent, committed and diverse teams, although of course no voting system can ever guarantee that candidate(s) with the desired competencies needed to fill a governance vacancy will be elected.

To the extent it is democratically possible, a new electoral system will enable the organization to elect balanced governance bodies. Achieving a more equitable representation of candidates is heavily reliant on sections actively engaging with the nomination and elections process and the role of the INC in fielding nominees who meet the essential requirements of a governance role. Amnesty International's governance system is complex; governors on the International Board must attend to both the demands of the movement as a federated global organization and to the demands of the International Secretariat with a large annual budget of approximately £85 million, approximately 600 staff and the requirements of external compliance. Thus the demands placed on Amnesty International's global governance bodies are not just representational but are also competency-based. Achieving broader representation in Amnesty's global governance calls for a wider application of the principles of diversity beyond the regional, gender and age dimensions that are currently set out in Global Governance Regulations (GGR) (Article 2.2.1) and to look for the relevant experience, skills and background that will contribute to the effective functioning of its governance system.

CONCLUSION

The case for reform presented in this document asks the movement to change its current voting model from FPTP to a fairer, more democratic system. Over the last six decades since the

organization was founded and especially since 2017 when governance reforms were introduced, Amnesty's internal organizational landscape has evolved significantly. Its voting system however has failed to keep pace with these changes. The International Board recommends FPTP should be replaced with a new preferential system of voting. Ultimately, the benefits of changing the voting model will only be realized by attracting and finding skilled and diverse talent (internally and externally), elevating the experience of governance and increasing the number of candidates standing for election that will strengthen Amnesty International's leadership and governance.

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APPENDIX I

Example using FPTP

Three candidates A, B and C running for a single committee position.

Votes from 64 voters

# of votes	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C
22	✓		
16		✓	
26			✓
Total votes	22	16	26

Under FPTP candidate C would be declared the winner.

However, supposing that:

35% (22 voters) prefer A, but would rather have B over C
 25% (16 voters) prefer B, but would rather have A over C
 25% (16 voters) prefer C, but would rather have A over B
 15% (10 voters) prefer C, but would rather have B over A

Even though the majority of voters (60%) prefer candidate A to candidate C, candidate A would not have been elected as they received only 35% of the vote. This means that the majority of voters are effectively left with their last choice. To combat the perceived failure of representation voters could resort to tactical voting. These weaknesses are inherent to the FPTP model.

Example using STV

Votes from 64 voters – First round

# of votes	22	16	16	10
1 st choice	A	B	C	C
2 nd choice	B	A	A	B
3 rd choice	C	C	B	A

Using the same example, candidate A would be elected under the STV voting model.

STV works by asking voters to number their candidates in order of preference. They can vote for as many or as few candidates as they wish. In this example, to be elected the winning candidate requires a majority of 33 votes.

As can be seen in the above table the threshold has not been met by any of the candidates and a second round of voting is required.

Votes from 64 voters – Second round

# of votes	22	16	16	10
1 st choice	A	B	C	C
2 nd choice	B	A	A	B
3 rd choice	C	C	B	A

The candidate with the fewest votes in the first round is removed from the count, which in this instance is Candidate B. Their votes are transferred to their second-choice candidate, candidate A, which increases candidate A's total to 38 votes giving them a clear majority especially when added to candidate C's second choice votes as well giving them an overall total of 54 votes.

If there were two vacancies to be filled and candidate A had achieved the majority of votes during the first round of voting, any extra votes they received above the threshold would be transferred to each voter's second favourite candidate thus ensuring all votes are counted and not "wasted". As the number of candidates and vacancies increase so too do the various permutations.