



Optional Preferential Voting (OPV)

FACT SHEET

Queensland State elections have used Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) since 1992. This voting system is not new to Queensland - a form of OPV was used here from 1892 to 1942. The reintroduction of OPV was recommended by the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC), and passed by Parliament on 11 April 1991. OPV is also used in Queensland local government elections (in those councils divided into single member wards or divisions) and in the NSW Lower House.

OPV is an unusual, if not unique, voting system. It gives voters more options to express their political opinions, while at the same time preserves the voting choice available under full preferential voting. Under preferential voting, voters have the opportunity to rank candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3, and so on). To win, a candidate must obtain a majority (more than half) of total formal votes in the count. Measure this against first-past-the-post voting, where electors do not express preferences beyond a first choice (they vote '1' only). To win, a candidate must gain more votes than any other candidate. A majority of total formal votes is not required.

OPV adds two additional options to the voter's choice, so that a valid vote may be cast by:

1. expressing a single primary preference for one candidate only, leaving all other squares blank (this is called 'plumping' for one candidate)
2. expressing a partial distribution of preferences by voting for some, but not all candidates on the ballot paper (for example, voting 1, 2, 3 on a ballot with five candidates)
3. expressing a full distribution of preferences (that is, marking every square in order of preference).

Instructions on how to cast your vote always appear on the ballot paper you receive in the polling booth. These read: 'Place the number one ('1') in the square opposite the candidate of your choice. You may if you wish indicate your preference for additional candidates by numbering the other squares in your preferred order.' You should note the instructions refer only to numbers. To ensure your vote counts at Queensland State elections, use number(s) only.

Counting the votes under OPV

The scrutiny or vote count for each of the 89 State electoral districts is done in stages.

1. First, ballot papers are sorted (and counted) into formal and informal votes. Ballot papers without a clear first preference are set aside as informal votes and are not admitted to the count.
2. The majority required to win the seat on first preference votes (primaries) is calculated by determining how many votes comprise 50 per cent + 1 of the total formal votes.
3. All formal ballot papers are then sorted by first preferences for each candidate and these are counted. If a candidate receives an absolute majority (50 per cent + 1) of first preference votes, then that candidate wins the election outright on primary votes. If no candidate wins a majority of first preference votes, then preference votes have to be counted to determine a winner.
4. The second count is done by excluding the candidate with the fewest votes, and distributing the second preferences as indicated. Ballot papers with no second preferences are set aside as exhausted votes reducing the total formal votes left in the count **and a new majority is calculated**. If a candidate has a majority (50 per cent + 1) of votes after preferences are distributed, then that candidate is the winner.

If no candidate has a majority after the second count, it is necessary to continue to a third count by excluding the next remaining candidate with the fewest votes and distributing the preferences as indicated. The counting continues until one candidate has a majority of votes.

For more information on how optional preferential voting works, phone the Commission on 1300 881 665. For more information on enrolling to vote, see the **How do I enrol?** section of the Commission's website on www.ecq.qld.gov.au.

E N R O L A N D V O T E

How OPV works - Sample OPV count

TALLYBOARD SHOWING RESULTS OF ELECTION IN DISTRICT OF PARADISE

| CANDIDATES | 1 st Count | 2 nd Count | 3 rd Count | 4 th Count |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| GREEN Emma | 7,000 | + 700 (from BLUE) = 7,700 | + 1,600 (from BROWN) = 9,300 | + 3,450 (from RED) = 12,750 |
| BROWN Matt | 4,000 | + 300 (from BLUE) = 4,300 | Excluded on the 3rd Count | |
| BLUE Tom | 2,000 | Excluded on the 2nd Count | | |
| BLACK Sam | 8,500 | + 400 (from BLUE) = 8,900 | + 900 (from BROWN) = 9,800 | + 1,500 (from RED) = 11,300 |
| RED Jack | 5,500 | + 200 (from BLUE) = 5,700 | + 400 (from BROWN) = 6,100 | Excluded on the 4th Count |
| Total Formal Votes | 27,000 | 26,600 | 25,200 | 24,050 |
| Exhausted Votes* | 0 | + 400 (from BLUE) = 400 | + 1,400 (from BROWN) = 1,800 | + 1,150 (from RED) = 2,950 |
| Informal Votes | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Total Votes | 28,000 | 28,000 | 28,000 | 28,000 |
| Votes remaining in the Count (Formal votes minus exhausted votes) | 27,000 - 0 = 27,000 | 27,000 - 400 = 26,600 | 26,600 - 1,400 = 25,200 | 25,200 - 1,150 = 24,050 |
| Majority needed to Win (50 percent of votes remaining in the count, plus 1) | $\frac{27,000}{2} + 1$ = 13,501 (Absolute Majority) | $\frac{26,600}{2} + 1$ = 13,301 (Majority of votes in the Count) | $\frac{25,200}{2} + 1$ = 12,601 (Majority of votes in the Count) | $\frac{24,050}{2} + 1$ = 12,026 (Majority of votes in the Count) |

*A vote is exhausted when a ballot paper has no second or further preferences to be distributed.

Follow the sample ballot papers

To the right are two of the 27,000 formal votes for the District of Paradise

SAMPLE BALLOT PAPER 1

District of Paradise

Instructions

Place the number one ("1") in the square opposite the candidate of your choice.

You may wish to indicate your preferences for additional candidates by numbering the other squares in your preferred order.

2 **GREEN, Emma**

4 **BROWN, Matt**

1 **BLUE, Tom**

5 **BLACK, Sam**

3 **RED, Jack**

SAMPLE BALLOT PAPER 2

District of Paradise

Instructions

Place the number one ("1") in the square opposite the candidate of your choice.

You may wish to indicate your preferences for additional candidates by numbering the other squares in your preferred order.

GREEN, Emma

1 **BROWN, Matt**

2 **BLUE, Tom**

BLACK, Sam

3 **RED, Jack**

E N R O L A N D V O T E

STEP 1

Check the results of the 1st Count. At this Count, ballot papers are credited to candidates by first preference votes (the number '1' on the ballot paper). Check sample ballot papers 1 and 2.

Question 1: *Which candidates are credited with Ballot Paper 1 and Ballot Paper 2?*

STEP 2

BLACK is winning on the 1st Count, but has no Absolute Majority. GREEN is coming second. BLUE (as the candidate with the least first preference votes) is excluded. Check the results of the 2nd Count. BLUE'S ballot papers are sorted by second preference and distributed to the four remaining candidates.

Question 2: *Which candidates are now credited with Ballot Paper 1 and Ballot Paper 2?*

STEP 3

BLACK is winning on the 2nd Count, but still has no Majority. GREEN is slowly catching up. BROWN (as the lowest remaining candidate) is excluded. Check the results of the 3rd Count. BROWN'S ballot papers are sorted by second preference (or third preference, if the second preference goes to BLUE) and distributed to the three remaining candidates.

Question 3: *Which candidates are now credited with Ballot Paper 1 and Ballot Paper 2?*

STEP 4

BLACK is winning on the 3rd Count, but still has no Majority. GREEN continues to make up ground. RED (as the lowest remaining candidate) is excluded. Check the results of the 4th Count. RED'S ballot papers are sorted by second (and third preference or fourth preference, if necessary) and distributed to the two remaining candidates.

Question 4: *Which candidates are now credited with Ballot Paper 1 and Ballot Paper 2?*

Questions 5: *Who has won the election for Paradise?*

Answers:

Question 1: *Which candidates are credited with Ballot Paper 1*
Answer: (BLUE) and Ballot Paper 2 Answer: (BROWN)

Question 2: *Which candidates are now credited with Ballot Paper 1*
Answer: (GREEN) and Ballot Paper 2 Answer: (BROWN)

Question 3: *Which candidates are now credited with Ballot Paper 1*
Answer: (GREEN) and Ballot Paper 2 Answer: (RED)

Question 4: *Which candidates are now credited with Ballot Paper 1*
Answer: (GREEN) and Ballot Paper 2 Answer: (Exhausted)

Questions 5: *Who has won the election for Paradise?*
Answer: (GREEN with 12,750 votes)

E N R O L A N D V O T E