

## **PRIMER ON THE SINGLE NON-TRANSFERABLE VOTE SYSTEM**

### **The Election System in Afghanistan: Single Non-Transferable Vote**

The Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) election system is used in “multi-member constituencies” (i.e. each constituency has more than one seat allocated in the parliament). Voters have, however, only one vote and can only choose a single candidate on the ballot in their constituency. The candidates with the highest number of valid votes win the seats allocated to their constituency.<sup>1</sup>

In Afghanistan, the SNTV is used for legislative and provincial council elections. In the country’s administration of the SNTV system, there are 35 multi-member constituencies: the country’s 34 provinces plus one Kuchi (nomad) constituency, which consists of the whole country. The constituencies have different number of seats allocated in the parliament, in proportion to their population.<sup>2</sup>

### **Advantages and disadvantages**

Supporters of the SNTV argue that the system provides an advantage for independent candidates, as it does not allow names to be grouped on party lists. They also assert that the system dissolves powerful political entities and their power bases, which assists in the transition to peace in post-conflict areas.

Critics claim the SNTV system discourages participation of political parties and tends to generate a large number of candidates. The higher quantity of candidates places higher logistical burdens on the electoral administration, e.g. massive ballot papers, and creates low thresholds. In 2005, candidates obtained seats in the Wolesi Jirga with less than one per cent of the vote.

Critics also refute the argument that SNTV diminishes the power bases of political elites. They argue that the only groups that are sufficiently disciplined and organized to take advantage of the characteristics of SNTV are the political elites whose influence the Afghan electoral law was intended to diminish.

### **Where else is the SNTV system used?**

The SNTV system is uncommon. It was once used for parliamentary elections in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Today, it is still used in Vanuatu, the Pitcairn Islands and Jordan, as well as the elections of the upper house in Indonesia and the Thai senate.

**Sources:** International IDEA: Electoral Systems Design, 2005-06

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<sup>1</sup> SNTV has been also described as First-Past-The-Post majority system (as used for example in the UK) for multi-member constituencies (as oppose to single-member constituencies as in the UK).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Kabul is the largest constituency with 33 seats, followed by Herat and Nangarhar with 17 and 14 seats respectively, while the smallest – Nimroz, Nuristan and Panjshir – have only two seats. Sixty-eight seats are reserved to women candidates under the constitution (one, two or three seats in most provinces, five in Herat and nine in Kabul).

EU Election Observation Mission Final Report, 2005  
NDI Election Observation Mission Final Report, 2009