

SES Essay Prize-Daniel Wooldridge
“ The Additional Member System”

Imagine this: a political system that aims to provide every voice a chance to be heard, where representation is more than just numbers in a “competition”, that helps politics become more inclusive by making political parties more aware of the opinions and ideas of its countries and constituencies citizens and potential voters. Well look no further, In Scottish politics a system that achieves this is already in place, it is a hybrid system combining both the elements of proportional representation and the First-Past-The-Post system as well. The system is known as “The Additional Members System.” Or in short. “The AMS” Not only does this system achieve the goals of making sure people get the chance to have their say but it can also help parties by making the results from the votes more proportional to each political party, which could arguably mean the system is a more fairer means of representation but it also helps influence potential voters as they might feel more inclined to vote as they feel their opinions are better reflected in parliamentary elections which would in turn increase voter turnout and engagement, which is another reason why this system continues to be used in Scottish politics.

In the AMS, Voters in Scotland can cast two votes: one for their preferred constituency candidate and another for a political party. This is referred to as “split ticket voting.” and is used to give voters more choice in potential candidates to choose from and/or vote for. For example a person who solely supports the Scottish National Party (SNP) can choose to support the SNP for constituency and Scottish Greens for the political party they want to elect as their second choice or maybe the other way round. But overall it gives the voters more choices to vote for and can improve the accuracy of reflecting the views of the voters.

Additionally, With a more proportional voting system, this could lead to higher voter turnout and engagement. Evidence to support this could be from the 2021 election, where voter turnout reached 63.5% which is the highest ever at a Scottish parliamentary election! This could be because voters feel their views are being more accurately represented in parliament, but also because they see it as a more “fairer” way of voting. This would be classed as an advantage because this means more votes are encouraged to vote in parliamentary elections.

In addition to what has already been discussed so far, another advantage of the AMS could be that it can lead to coalition governments being elected or power shares being made. These mean that MSP’s have to seek unison and work together in order to properly function. To exemplify, The Scottish Nationalist party have recently formed an agreement with the Scottish Greens, Creating a majority in the creativity government on a vast 71-57 majority, but coalition governments can always be scrapped, for example the Bute House Agreement, On April 25th 2024 the agreement between 2 parliamentary parties, The SNP and the Scottish Greens, had

recently been “destroyed”, which can lead to a minority government for the SNP giving them even less power than they would have had before.

Another disadvantage of the AMS is that the coalition and minority governments have always been classed as a “weak form of government.” But past experience does not reflect that. For example, the Labour and Liberal Democrats coalition government were stable for 2 sessions and ended up being able to provide free personal care for the elderly, SNP governments introduced free prescriptions and the minimum unit price for alcohol and finally the majority government brought in the independence referendum. So this means that just because they got less seats in parliament does not mean they cannot introduce plans and improvements for the country but they are still categorised as being weaker than they are, which is mendacious and unbelievable.

Another drawback of the AMS is that the system is considered complex. This is due to the fact that voters have to vote twice and for different things as well, constituency MSP and regional party. This can consequently mean that people become discouraged from voting. During Scottish parliamentary elections turnout is lower than other voting systems. For example the First Past The Post (FPTP) system in the 2019 general election resulted in a 67% turnout but in the 2016 Scottish parliamentary election the voter turnout was 55.6% which is over 10% less suggesting that maybe more people prefer the FPTP because it is “easier” for them or because they feel more comfortable voting with that specific system.

My last negative point about the AMS system is that power sharing can result in too much influence to a smaller party in the Scottish Parliament. For instance, the Scottish Greens since 2021 had held two ministerial roles, and had a huge influence on government policy due to their cooperation agreement with the SNP, which has recently been demolished as of the end of April. They had less than 10% of the votes and only 8 MSPs yet they have a lot of power? Which could result in some people thinking that they have more power than the voters intended them to have. Which can result in voters believing that even if they vote these people will still have “loads” of power even if they vote so why would they try voting, some would also see this as unjust and unfair or even making them feel like they have been cheated, like their vote was just cast away as they did not want this result and they should not have gotten it.

In conclusion, I have many mixed feelings about the AMS, slightly more negative than positive, this is due to the fact that smaller parties can have more power than voters really wanted them to have, which can be seen as unfair and disproportionate to many across the country. And also because of the fact that certain types of governments can be classed as weak when they are really the opposite, it infuriates me, because these opinions are basically built upon false thinking instead of learning what these governments have done for the country and the impacts they have made.

But in all due respect it is fairly proportional and it does reflect the views of the voters quite well due to also getting rid of “safety seats.” Which also helps reflect the views of the voters but saying that the system is also seen as too complex by many voters which also does not help the AMS system in this case. But overall the AMS system is used by many voters in Scotland and roughly achieves its purpose so can be seen as a good system of voting in Scotland.