

Enhancing Representative Government

Summary

The feeling of disenfranchisement engendered by the first past the post voting system might be lessened by engaging both candidates and electors in a broader discussion of how individual candidates will represent the disparate concerns of all of their constituents. In theory a multiple round voting system would probably best achieve the aim of greater engagement between the candidate and elector. In practice transferable preferential voting is seen as a practical route to that end.

Enhancing the balloting process through multiple round voting

The desired outcome for elections in Canada is for each electoral riding to select a representative who will represent the interests of that riding. After their election the member of parliament is charged with the responsibility of not only representing their riding but also adhering to the discipline of the party under who's banner they ran. This often leads to the perception among those who did not vote for the successful candidate that their interests are not being adequately represented by their MP. In the situation in which a multitude of candidates present themselves for election in a particular riding the electoral outcome in the first past the post system might be the election of an MP who received less than one third of the vote. That MP is probably perceived to be representing primarily the interest of their party.

For constituents to feel that their MP is representing their interests it may be beneficial for them to have actively supported that MP through the electoral process. One process that works well in this regard is that of multiple rounds of voting. By eliminating the least popular candidates one by one from each subsequent ballot the electors are given the opportunity to choose the candidate that they perceive will best represent their views. In practice it is suggested that after a general election a bye-election would be held within thirty days in any riding in which the winning candidate did not receive fifty percent plus one of all votes cast. The bye election would be limited to those candidates who have received ten percent plus one of all votes cast and with at least one candidate from the previous ballot removed from the bye-election ballot.

The proposed multiple rounds voting system would be more responsive to the constituents' concerns in individual ridings by forcing the candidate to recognize those concerns and the constituents' involvement in choosing the candidate who ultimately represents them. It is speculated that the candidates would be more cognizant of their constituents' concerns and might attempt to articulate their responses to those concerns during the election campaign.

Enhancing the voting process

While the current system of paper ballots has a lot to commend it a digitized enhancement would be appropriate. Every taxpayer has an electronic identification on file with Canada Revenue Agency. This system should be extended to all those who are eligible to vote in Canadian elections. This database would serve as a permanent voter's list. This list could be used to facilitate both the current paper ballot system and a complementary digital system. The digital system should allow for advanced voting as well as casting one's ballot on the actual election date without needing to physically go to a polling station. Importantly the digitized system would facilitate the use of transferable preferential voting.

Transferable preferential voting is a practical alternative to multiple rounds voting

While a multiple rounds voting system is preferred in theory it is recognized that such a system may not be practical in the sense that the political energy would not be available to power such an extended process. Many of the best features of a multiple rounds voting system might well be captured by transferable preferential voting. In such a system the ballot would allow for selection of two candidates as first or second choices. In the event no given candidate received fifty percent of the votes cast all second choices of the last place candidate would be added to the remaining candidates' totals. This transfer process would be repeated until a clear majority is achieved. It is hoped that this system would encourage candidates to articulate policies which appealed to a broad cross-section of the riding constituents and the electors to in turn consider the various candidates' platforms prior to ranking their choices.

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